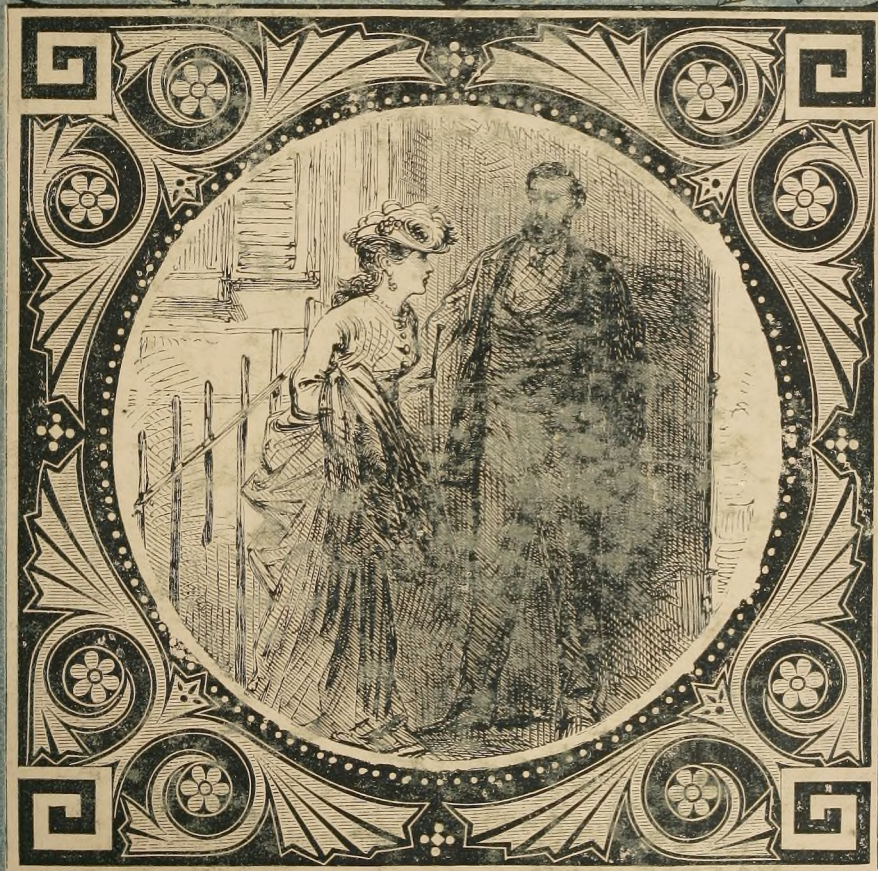


THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS

JUSTIN MCCARTHY



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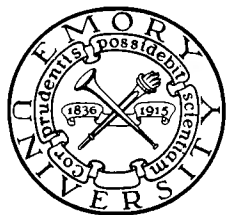
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THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS.

THE
WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS.

BY

JUSTIN M^CCARTHY,

AUTHOR OF "CON AMORE," "PAUL MASSIE," ETC.

"Un tel homme est cinq cents brasses au dessus des royaumes et des
duchez : il est luy mesme à soy son empire."

MONTAIGNE.

NEW EDITION.

LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

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THE WATERDALE NEIGHBOURS.



CHAPTER I.

THE BROKEN HERO.

THE English tourist who stays for even two or three days at Lucerne is sure to steam up that short arm of the lake-cross which points to Küssnacht, where, according to fame and chronicle and Schiller, William Tell sent the arrow into Gessler's heart. He will probably take a carriage and drive along the road, between vines and apple-trees and beehives, until he reaches the memorial chapel with the daub, like a public-house sign, outside it, representing the death of the tyrant, and exhibiting, conspicuous in the foreground, a floundering, supplicating woman, whom the guide or driver is pretty sure to describe as Tell's wife, but whom the tourist, consulting, like all the world now, his Schiller for history, knows to be Armgart, the wife of the imprisoned peasant. Perhaps he is disappointed with the tame, rural, and orchard-like appearance of the quiet little ascending road, with its modest green banks on either side, and thinks it very unlike indeed to the wild ravine full of jagged rocks, avalanche-menaced and thunder-blasted, which he had learned from Schiller to picture as the Pass of Küssnacht. So, it may be, he returns straightway to the lake and to Lucerne. But if he still keeps on, leaving Lucerne and Küssnacht behind, and pursues the apple-bordered road, he will very soon break out upon a charming and, supposing him new to the place, a very unexpected sight. Beneath his feet, as he emerges from the trees, lies the tiny lovely Lake of Zug—so quiet, passionless,

and dreamy, that it reminds him of Grasmere or Killarney, rather than of the waters that lie blue and glowing under the fierce white glare of Alpine snows. And, still following the road that now skirts the lake, he sees at last, full in front of him, at the farther end of the pool, and nestling quite down to the edge of the water, a quaint, odd-looking old town with glittering spire and red roofs, rather German than Swiss of aspect, and apparently enjoying a genuine Teutonic sleepiness. Perhaps the town, if one were to enter, would prove uninviting and dirty, with noisome gutters and abounding in queer smells; but to those who, like the present writer, have only gazed from a picturesque distance and never entered, it is all charming—a sleeping town, so close to the waters of a transparent lake that you can hardly distinguish the reflected houses beneath the surface of the pool from the realities above; and both look equally dreamy and fairy-like and beautiful.

“Now, that is just the place, I think, for some one who really wanted to retire from the world, isn’t it? If I were some disappointed man I would go and live just there, and never leave it until I died; and then they should bury me near the edge of the lake.”

“Yes; but I don’t much believe in retiring from the world. Why not live in the world, and do some good there?”

“But a disappointed man, you know, dearest, or woman,—somebody who really could not bear up, and was broken down!”

“Why not endeavour to work off his disappointment, or hers, by trying to do some good for somebody?”

“Yes; but suppose, you practical dear—suppose somebody who had done all the good he could do, or wanted to do, and could do nothing more? A defeated hero, suppose? Come, that’s just it! A broken hero, world-defeated perhaps, with an ungrateful country that would not be saved, let him try his very best; and at last he goes away, not angry, you know, but sorrowful and resigned—and so he lives here; and he floats over the lake in a boat, and he communes with nature of evenings like this, and he knows nobody, and is alone. I think the idea is delightful. Is not this the very place for him?”

Her companion laughed—(we need hardly say that the last speaker was a woman); his laugh was full, genial, manly; and

he looked down at her as she stood by his side with a fond, indulgent, admiring expression. He was very proud of her, and delighted in her ; most of all, perhaps, when she talked some romantic feminine sort of nonsense ; for she did not often thus indulge, but was usually rather earnest, eager, and, in a certain sense, practical. He was a tall, well-built, fine-looking man, with thick curling hair fast growing grey,—indeed, quite white in some places,—and closely-clipped grey whiskers. One might have called him stately, but that there was something about him too genial, good-humoured, and friendly, to warrant the cold impressiveness of such a word. Although grey-haired, he was fresh and strong and straight ; a man of fifty, perhaps, who would have looked quite young still, but that his hair had prematurely lost its colour. His companion was perhaps half his age, and about half his size. She was a beautiful little dark-haired, dark-eyed woman, with refined and delicate features and pale complexion ; only a faint trace of colour in it here and there, just like the first slight blush of the dawn in a pallid sky,—of which, it need not be explained to any poetic reader, her eyes were the stars. She was exquisitely dressed,—all trailing silk and feathers and chains and what not,—a charming figure for a drawing-room, or even a *table d'hôte* at the Schweizer Hof, but looking a little odd and out of place on the road by the Lake of Zug. Some women, and more especially little women, seem so inseparable from fine clothes, that one can hardly help thinking they must have been literally—not figuratively—born in the purple of glistening silks and phosphorescent velvets. Yet this was a strong little woman too, well able to hold her own, and do her work in the world ; and her husband and she had had no carriage from the steamer's pier at Küsnacht, but had walked thus far, and meant to walk back again.

"Perhaps somebody is looking down on our own little lake at home, Myra," said the husband, "and fancying it just the place for a broken hero's retirement ; and yet *we* are not quite lonely there, nor very dejected, nor out of work ; and we don't creep into bushes there to groan and die."

"No ; but it has not the lonely, placid look of this, somehow. I always associate our lake and all about it with our work, which I love, and our constant duties and occupations, and life seems all energy to me there. Here it seems all repose and doing nothing—only, I suppose, because the place is strange

to me. Of course, I could not imagine my broken hero at Lucerne—he might as well be found in Regent Street. But I do delight in the idea of imagining him *here*; and I shall always picture him to my mind as a solitary figure somewhere on the bank of this dear little lake. When I get home I will paint him some day in water-colours and send him to the Exhibition—where I dare say they will never let him in. No matter; I will paint him—if I have time.”

“Dear little Myra, I fear your round of parish work has sadly eaten up your time for art. Sometimes I think it a pity.”

“Then pray don’t think it so any more,” she said, looking eagerly up at him. “I love my round of parish work—I delight in having my duties, as you have yours. What do I want with painting, or care about it—except now and then as an amusement? All that sort of thing is nonsense, and I hope I have thrown my nonsense away.”

Her husband almost sighed; and looked down at her with a tender expression of something like compassion as well as love.

“The nonsense is the brightest part of life, most women think,” he said; “but you are not like other women, dearest—happily for me.”

She pressed his arm gratefully.

“But, now, of your world-defeated hero—your Columbus who has come back without finding America—your Garibaldi who has not entered Naples; and who is to live and die here. What is he to be like? Like me, for instance?”

She laughed merrily.

“O no, dear: you are too strong and energetic and clever. He must be darker, and paler, and perhaps—”

She stopped, a little confused.

“And a good deal younger, lassie? Why not? All the better too, to give the picture value as a fable. A man must be still young to be tragical and disappointed and moody. Your defeated hero, were he my age, would be too conscious of the value of time to waste any in lonely regrets. He would be attempting something else straightway. But your picture will be consistent with truth and nature. Your defeated hero will meditate and perhaps lament here for a season or so, and then, trust me, he will take to the world and work again—and he will win next time.”

"He will—indeed he will!" said she, looking earnestly up, as if they had been talking of some real being.

Her husband laughed, a happy, loving laugh.

"If you become so seriously interested in the fortunes of our hero—*your* hero, I should rather say—I shall be growing jealous of him presently. But I promise you I'll hold you to your word: I'll find time for you to paint this picture."

"O, I can do it if you will help me, and make time for me, and keep me up to it. But who's to sit for the hero? I don't know of any one in our place who bears the slightest resemblance to such a creature."

"No, neither do I. Our people are for the most part only oatmeal and rye, and such other homely useful growths: not flowers—passion-flowers especially. I am more fortunate than you, Myra—or should be, if I were an artist. If I want to paint a beautiful heroine I have not far to look."

"Flatterer!" She smiled delightedly as she looked up, knowing that from him there came no flattery, but only the pure and simple truth.

They remained silent a moment. Suddenly a splash of the water attracted the attention of the husband, and he looked on the lake, then said in a low tone, "See, Myra, here comes your broken hero. Here he is in his own proper person."

For a boat had been slowly approaching the shore, unperceived hitherto by our pair while they talked. A man was lazily propelling it with his pair of oars.

"He is an Englishman," said Myra's husband in an undertone. Myra's husband had been an Oxford man, and rowed well in his day; and always in late years made a point of seeing the great annual race on the Thames; and he knew an Englishman's touch at an oar by sight, however lazily it might suit the Englishman's humour to pull.

The new-comer ran his boat in upon the shore, then got out, doing everything slowly and rather listlessly, and pulled it up safe from the water. Then he arranged the oars in it, and came up the bank, until he stood on the road close to our English pair. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, slightly-stooping man, with dark full beard and moustache, eyes not so dark as the colour of his beard and his complexion might lead one to expect, and square forehead with thick wavy hair. A young man he seemed to the Rev. Dr. Alwyn, our friend, who now looked at him; almost an elderly sort of person to Dr.

Alwyn's young wife. He was probably not much inside forty years of age; but there was a certain wasted look about his face which might have suggested to a worldly-wise observer that youth's chymic treasure had perhaps been spent betimes. To any eye, however careless, he was a remarkable figure. Dr. Alwyn took his measure, or believed he did, in a moment. "Odd," he thought—"poor, perhaps: but a gentleman."

Myra surveyed him with equal interest, but under her eyes. She was disappointed. "Not at all my broken hero," she said to herself; "yet there's something of a broken and defeated look about him, too."

"Good evening, sir," said Dr. Alwyn, at once addressing the stranger frankly, as if they ought to be friends. "An Englishman, I know! I saw it at a glance by the way you handled the oars."

The stranger took off his hat to the lady, showing a brown, muscular hand as he did so; and showing too—what might have been a good deal more surprising—that the sight of a lady embarrassed him. He looked away from her to her husband, and appeared to warm a little at the sight of that genial and manly face.

"Yes," he said, in slow and somewhat embarrassed tones, "an Englishman. I suppose we are easily recognised anywhere."

"And a north-of-England man, too!" said the Doctor joyously.

The stranger looked surprised.

"Yes, indeed, a north-of-England man," he replied.

"Ah, I knew it in a moment. I knew your country by observing the touch of your hand—your county, I may venture to say, by the sound of your voice. I am a north-of-England man myself, and whatever they may say of us in the south, I always hold that we are the friendliest of all Englishmen—at least to each other. I am glad to hear the tones of a northern voice."

"And so am I—indeed I am!" replied the stranger, with a sort of sudden burst of heartiness, which called into play a sweetness and geniality of expression about the lips one would hardly at first have expected to see, but which, as he happened just at that moment to meet Myra's dark eyes, kept studiously devoid as they were of all expression of interest or emotion, as suddenly subsided, and, after a moment of embarrassment,

left him again grave as before. To say the truth, she was uneasily considering what the stranger, if he should prove to be a gentleman, might be thinking of her husband's impulsive friendliness, and was perhaps determined that she at least should not be supposed capable of any participation in it. So she regarded the new-comer with calm eyes of the best-bred impassiveness. The latter crossed to the Doctor's side, and, as our pair were beginning to resume their walk, he walked along with them towards the little town at the head of the lake. He and the Doctor at all events were friends already.

"Yes," continued the stranger, "I am glad to hear a voice that reminds me of the north. The fact is, I have been out of England for many years. I have been in Australia, digging and sheep-farming, and I don't know what else. But I come from the north—from Cumberland, in fact."

"I knew it!" said the Doctor triumphantly.—"I knew it, Myra dear!" and he thus dragged his wife into the conversation.

"Yes, dear," she demurely answered; and would not be dragged any farther.

"There have been plenty of changes in the north during the last few years," the Doctor continued. "You will find a good deal to wonder at when you go back, if you are going back."

"Yes, I am going back—soon, too; but I don't expect to find much change in the little out-of-the-way place where I used to live, and mean to live again—if I can stand it. There cannot be much change in hills and water."

"Nay, railways and tunnels and steamers make a sad change, as you probably will find. *We* live close to a lake—not one of the show-lakes, though—and we are every day expecting to find the hills behind us pierced with a tunnel, and a service of steamers plying on the lake, and shoals of visitors pouring in just as at Windermere, or there behind us at Lucerne. My wife is unhappy at the prospect. I can't say that I am, much. I am fond of nature, but I don't want her all to myself; and I like humanity very well."

"I am going to live, or try to live, near a lake, too; but I hope I shall not find it too much in the clutches of humanity. It used not to be so. I have been staying here in the little town below for a few days, just because it reminded me of the old place, and is, as quiet and lonely sometimes—when the steamers do not happen to be coming and going—as the old place used to be."

"Now, this *is* odd," Dr. Alwyn said. "It is not five minutes since I was thinking how much this lake is like *our* lake at home—only that ours is smaller. I was saying so to my wife. Was I not, Myra? May I ask the name of the place you are going to live in?"

The stranger mentioned a district and a little lake in the borderland somewhere of Cumberland and Lancashire. Not one of the show-lakes, indeed, as Dr. Alwyn had observed. It is hardly mentioned in any guide-book. Flights of strangers swoop over it and around it, and hardly ever alight on it—hardly ever rest even a moment on its banks. The Doctor was delighted to hear the name—it was Waterdale; it was *his* lake.

"Here is, indeed, a coincidence!" he exclaimed, "That's *our* lake. Somehow I expected it the moment you spoke of Cumberland and a lake. We are to be neighbours, then. Let me introduce myself, politely now if I can, as I have done it practically and unceremoniously already. My name is Alwyn—Dr. Alwyn—and I am rector of Waterdale."

The stranger bowed, and reciprocated the confidence.

"My name is Lennon—Ralph Lennon."

"Lennon—Lennon!" thought the Doctor. "Surely I know something about that name!" But he did not embarrass his new friend by a pause, as if he were studying the name; only at once expressed in friendly terms a hope that they might meet before long in Cumberland, and be good neighbours.

Mr. Lennon stole now and then a glance at Myra, who walked along, calm, graceful, and silent.

When they came near the little town, Lennon made a desperate effort to overcome shyness, and invited Dr. Alwyn to rest for a while at the small hotel where he lodged. "I have been staying there with a young Frenchman—a friend," he said; "but my friend is away, just now, up Pilatus, or at the Grütli, or somewhere. The lady, Miss Alwyn, must feel tired; and your way back is long. I can get you a carriage."

"O, we are stout walkers," Dr. Alwyn replied, "and don't mind the distance at all." His wife had given his arm an eager admonition that they must not accept the invitation. "But I ought to have introduced to you, Mr. Lennon, not Miss Alwyn—for there is none such, indeed—but Mrs. Alwyn, my wife."

Lennon's confusion at this little incident was great. He had

naturally enough taken Myra for the Doctor's daughter, and had not noticed or understood the Doctor's frequent references to her as his wife. Indeed, his embarrassment was so great that he was glad to get away from his new friends—or friend—and escape to his hotel. But the Doctor, who was only amused at the mistake, did not allow him to go without some exchange of friendly words, and hopes to meet again. The two men shook hands on parting. Lennon looked doubtfully at Myra; she settled the question by bowing gracefully. He raised his hat and went his way.

"What a strange coincidence," observed Dr. Alwyn to his wife, as they returned, "that we should both come from the same place, and meet by chance just here!"

"Life is all strange coincidences," said the lady sententiously. "The unforeseen always comes to pass, according to somebody—Disraeli, I think."

"What of your picture now, Myra? Will *he* do for your broken hero?"

"He? Who? Disraeli?"

"Nonsense! I mean Lennon—our friend yonder."

"Hero? No; I think he is more like a goose."

"Come, now, I don't think so at all. I see a good deal of the falcon or the eagle in him. But I cannot recollect what it is that I know of the name Lennon. It seems familiar to me."

"I think I know," said Myra. "The large old house down in the hollow—across the bridge, you remember—the house that poor Mrs. Granger had for a season or two, and that has lately been unoccupied—that belonged, or belongs, I have always heard, to somebody named Lennon."

"So it does, indeed. Of course, that is it. The owner died before I came to the parish, and this is his son. I think I have heard something of him, too; and something peculiar. If I am not much mistaken, his college course was rather a queer one, and ended very abruptly. Do you know, Myra, I should not be at all surprised if he were to turn out a broken hero quite of your style."

"O no; not at all in my style. I don't think him in the least like the thing. What happened to him in college?"

Dr. Alwyn did not remember the whole affair clearly enough, and was not sufficiently sure of his man to enter into any particulars, which might only be spreading an unfounded story

against an individual reputation. But he had a vague impression that Lennon had been expelled from his University for some wild act of rebellion against constituted theology.

Nothing more was said at that time, as our pair walked back to Küssnacht. The evening was beautiful, and some light rain which had fallen an hour or two before lent a wonderful freshness to the air and the foliage. Every stone was the sunny resting-place of a basking insect; every tuft of grass sparkled with butterflies and dragon-flies, and other bright-winged creatures. The bells of the cows tinkled pleasantly everywhere; and all the sights and sounds of the evening were cheery, gracious, melodious. Dr. Alwyn and his wife were both botanists, and they paused many a time on their walk to study and delight over some wonderful leaf, or to hail as a dear and familiar old acquaintance some plant which was a common sight to them in their own English home. They enjoyed their evening, and were very happy. They had been little more than a twelvemonth married, and life was yet a honeymoon to both. The difference in their years seemed in no way to divide them—indeed, the husband's boyish heart and unworn nature made him sometimes seem the junior of his wife. They had enjoyed the evening so much that both were sorry, without saying so, when the steamer at last brought them under the black shadows of Pilatus, and so up to the quay at Lucerne and the dining-table of the Schweizer Hof.

A day or two passed away without incident. They sailed or steamed on the lake, and they rambled over the old bridges and studied the Dance of Death, and they mounted the Rigi, no doubt, and fell in with the usual mist, which is the one original sin of that Paradise of Cockneys and Frenchwomen.

One day they returned to the hotel quite too late for the *table d'hôte*, and therefore ordered dinner for themselves. While they were waiting, two gentlemen entered, likewise belated and in need of dinner. One was a fresh-complexioned, black-haired, pigeon-breasted, handsome young Frenchman, with moustache saucily waxed and pointed, and eyes that twinkled like drops of liquefied jet. The other was Ralph Lennon, listless and unimpulsive as before. Dr. Alwyn went up to him, and a friendly conversation took place out of earshot of Myra. Then they all came up to the table where she sat, and Lennon's young Frenchman was introduced in due form. He was a Parisian, a member of the Jockey Club, and some-

what of a swell, travelling for his pleasure. He spoke English with great fluency and vivacity.

"Madame has made the ascension of the Rigi?"

He at once devoted himself exclusively to madame.

"Oh yes; it was delightful."

"Ah, true—yes, indeed! But little—tame; no danger! I have made all the ascensions—yes, all! It is my passion! What would you have? Lion-hunting and the ascensions of the mountains! I live for those. My friend here will not ascend the mountains; but he has hunted the lion with me in Algeria."

"You will be killed some day," said Mrs. Alwyn, "and your life will be thrown away for nothing."

"Not improbable. But what matter? One must die. What lives a man for—a man like me or my friend there? Monsieur your husband—ah, well, he has something to live for!" and the gallant Frenchman darted bold glances upon madame.

It was proposed that they should "join tables," and they did; and the dinner passed off very pleasantly. It came out in the course of conversation that Lennon and his travelling companion had been friends years ago, in London and in Paris, and that they had lately met after long separation in Algeria; and after spending a few weeks together, they had agreed to go into Switzerland before Lennon's return to England. Lennon had come from Australia, overland, as far as Egypt, and there stayed for a little, and thence found his way to Algeria.

"You don't ascend mountains?" said Dr. Alwyn casually to Lennon.

"No; I don't. I don't see the good of it. I am far too lazy. Life is not long enough, or easy enough, to allow any superfluous trouble. Besides, I like fine views, and nobody can see anything from the top of a mountain."

"But the strange vegetation?"

"Ah, true; but I don't care about strange vegetation."

"You are not a botanist, then?"

"O dear, no! a scientific botanist—not the least—and I don't want to be."

"Why not?" asked Myra, almost sharply.

"Because I am such a lover of nature that I don't care to spend my time pottering over the bricks of her temple when I can look at the whole structure, or so much as my eye can reach, all at once."

"But, Mr. Lennon," broke in Dr. Alwyn, "do you forget the wonderful beauty in every fibre of a fern-leaf—the marvellous adaptability, the subtle mechanism?"

"They tell me, too, that there is wonderful beauty and adaptability and mechanism in the tiniest human bone. But I prefer admiring Canova's Venus or Thorwaldsen's Night to studying a scrap of a rib-bone."

"Illustration is sophistry coloured," said Dr. Alwyn, laughing.

"My friend is a true heretic," said the Frenchman, who knew no more about botany than he did about the Philosophy of the Conditioned. "I adore nature—I—in the small as well as in the large. The eye of beauty is worth studying, is it not?" And he gazed at Myra markedly, in order that she might understand he was paying her a double compliment; first, by standing up for botany because it was her study, and next, by talking of the eye of beauty, which of course was *her* eye. Myra saw quite through his nonsense, and did not care in the least about it, being neither flattered nor offended, but liking his goodnatured expression and the almost childlike simplicity of his open admiration. But she began to think there was something in Lennon. His contradictions piqued her, and his manner puzzled her.

"Not caring for botany," she said, gazing at him so fully that he looked away, "you will miss a great happiness when you go to Cumberland, to your home. Do you call it your home?"

"No, Mrs. Alwyn. If it likes me and I like it, then it shall be my home. But I don't see that because a man was born in a place, it has any claim to call itself his home. Perhaps it was only his stepmother, and stony-hearted. I am fond of its memory though, and I dare say it will disappoint me. But I don't go there to study botany or anything else."

"You go there to live among your friends and be happy, no doubt?"

"No; pardon me, I really don't. I have no friends there that I know of, and I don't think of being happy."

"Then—may one ask the question?—what do you go there for?"

"I think, on the whole, I go there—to sleep."

General laughter followed this declaration. Lennon alone remained perfectly serious, as one who has made a calm and practical statement of fact.

"I do assure you," he said, "it is in some part true. I am tired of working and going about, and making money and losing it and spending it ; I am tired of being excited about nothing ; and I am tired of being disappointed. I have come to the conclusion that the one duty of life which man most neglects is the duty to sleep. We don't any of us sleep half enough. We can't sleep in Australia : every one is too robust and energetic and active. You can't sleep in Africa, because of the heat and the flies. I have not been much in Asia : I dare say Damascus is a good sleepy place ; but I have lately thought of my old home among the mountains, and there I mean to sleep away some years of my life, if I can."

"That you can't," Dr. Alwyn declared. "Not near us—not if I know it. *We'll* waken you up, never fear, and set you working at something. I am 'sure you are a wonderfully energetic fellow, for all your paradoxes."

"You must not frighten him," said the Frenchman, "or he will beat in retreat back to his deserts and his bushes and his sheeps in Australia again. I am coming over to see him soon, when he is ranged and settled. I will show you how to manage him, if madame shall not have divined the secret long before."

"I should so much like to see Australia," Mrs. Alwyn observed. "I have always longed to see the Southern Cross."

"It would disappoint you," Lennon answered. "Our own Orion is incomparably more splendid."

"You love astronomy ?"

"No, not at all ; but I love Orion. If I do not sleep all my autumn nights away in Cumberland, it will be Orion alone that can keep me awake. He is in the skies what Shakespeare is in literature—inexhaustible, and never to be admired enough."

"I *know* that you are a botanist and an astronomer, as well as a reader," Mrs. Alwyn said.

"And I am convinced you are a worker," added her husband.

"Thanks for your good opinion. If I were vain, or wise perhaps, I ought to return to Australia, and then you would always believe that Cumberland had lost a good son. See ! there is Orion. Let us look at him."

They opened the window, and went on the balcony. It was a glorious sight. The lake and the heavens—which was the

finer? Our French friend cared not a rush for either, but stood near Mrs. Alwyn and paid her pretty compliments.

The party soon broke up, all hoping to meet again.

Lennon and his friend walked by the lake and smoked, at first in silence.

"But she is charming!" the Frenchman broke out.

"Who is charming?"

"Who?—as if you did not know! Ah, *coquin!* Who but madame, the wife of the venerable yonder? What—yes! I should like to be near her for ever. And you are going to live near her—happy Briton that you are! But the husband—ah!" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't, Theodore; don't, like a good fellow," said his companion.

"Don't what?"

"Go on in that silly way. I hate that sort of rubbish. The cant of virtue is bad; but I do think the cant of vice is a great deal worse. What right have you and I to go on making ourselves out scoundrels when we are not so? I am for a man being openly what he is—carrying his heart upon his sleeve, if you like."

"Yes, I know; it is your Shakespeare's phrase."

"And so if we were scoundrels I should be for our talking scoundrel talk; and then, at all events, our neighbours might keep out of our way. But we are not."

"But, my good friend, scoundrels because we admire a pretty woman?"

"No, not because we admire her; but talking as you did just now, or hinting or suggesting what you don't mean—for you are an honest and manly fellow as ever stepped, and can't help your confounded French way of never looking at a woman without affecting the Richelieu or Lauzun—I detest it; and it doesn't suit our English married women at all. They are quite accustomed to be friendly with men without supposing that the men are all the time contemplating the possibility of seducing them."

"But, *allons donc!* Who ever said anything like that of our pretty madame above?"

"You did not *say* it exactly; but you began the kind of talk that leads to it and hints at it."

"Well, pardon then." Theodore was a thoroughly good-humoured fellow, always ready to make allowance for what he

might perchance consider his friend's eccentric insular ways. "I did not mean anything. But you *are* going to live near her, that is certain ; and she *is* pretty ; and pardon again if I whisper that Monsieur the Reverend is not quite so young as madame his wife."

"He struck me as being a very fine fellow. I dare say he would make a gallant figure in a lion-hunt, Theodore. If I were a woman, I think he would attract me ten times more than fellows like you or me."

Theodore laughed merrily. "Thousand thanks for the compliment ! I am happy of it that you are not a woman. I am sure I never should be enamoured of you, if you were. I like you much better as a good-hearted surly John Bull, that can bark, but does not bite—his friends at least."

The two smoked and walked and talked until a rather late hour. They were leaving Lucerne in the morning, and, despite Lennon's love for sleep, they were up almost immediately after dawn. Their rooms were high up aloft ; and as they were hurrying downstairs Theodore paused mysteriously outside a bedroom-door on the first floor, and touched his friend on the arm.

"That is *her* room," he whispered. "*She* sleeps there."

"Indeed," calmly rejoined Lennon. "Kiss the consecrated threshold."

"Bah ! You are a mere Briton. You have no soul."

"No, but I have a stomach ; and breakfast is waiting."

In half an hour they were on their way across the mountains.

CHAPTER II.

FOR ENGLAND.

THROUGH the horrid gloom of pines—the adjective comes in here in the classic, not the cockney sense—over little wooden bridges, flung across gorges where the far torrent thundered below ; along narrow paths, where just the one mule clinging close to the edge of the precipice might walk ; now in a pass so closely set in by the mountains that one seemed to be in the lowest deep of a profound valley, and yet was high up the

shoulder of some Alpine giant ; now seeing nothing but mist and blackness ; now suddenly dazzled by the snowy glare of a summit flashing on the view ; hearing no sound but the hollow roar of the pines and the tinkle of the kine-bells, and more rarely the crack of the muleteer's whip,—thus, at the close of a day that had made glorious promise to break it in rain and murkiness, Ralph Lennon trudged along alone. He had parted from his French companion. From Lucerne they had straggled about—now here, now there—until they reached Chamounix ; and there the Frenchman, who had already made six ascents of Mont Blanc, fell in with a party of men he knew, who were about to go up, and so resolved to have a seventh ascent to talk of. Lennon made up his mind at once to cross the mountains to Martigny, walking through the famous path of the Tête Noire, where only pedestrians and mules can go. At Martigny he would take the train for Lausanne and thence on to Geneva ; and so to Paris, and home.

He was glad to be alone for a few hours. He had had enough of companionship for the present ; so he saw his companion and party a little on their way, rejected all invitations to go up even as far as the Grands Mulets ; and then set out upon the solitary journey which was to have its termination on the Lancashire border of Cumberland.

Lennon was well made up for a mountain tramp. He carried only a few things in a light knapsack, and he had a good stout stick—no fancy alpenstock branded with a litany of all the hills and passes and peaks in Switzerland. The morning was beautiful ; and by the time he had got well up among the mountains his heart and spirits mounted too, and he felt light almost as a boy. The solitude was delightful to him, after the incessant bustle and rattle and change of hotels, and the unresting energy of preparation which is Chamounix's special characteristic. Lennon was as nearly a genuine lover of solitude as perhaps any man can sincerely be ; that is to say, he enjoyed only the society of the few whom he really liked, and could call his friends. He could have wished never to leave the side of one he loved, if such one there now were ; but he did not like ordinary society. He was not fond of talking to people in general. The excuse he made to any who chaffed him for his silence was, that unless to people he liked he had nothing to say ; and unless from people he liked he did not want to hear anything. He could travel for a whole day

in a railway carriage and never utter one word to any of his fellow-voyagers. He journeyed once a day and a night in a German *schnellzug* alone with one other man, and never spoke a word to him ; and when accosted by him shook his head, as if to signify that he did not understand, and so escaped conversation. He had often acknowledged that he enjoyed travelling in foreign countries especially because it afforded him a reason for not talking to strangers. If he did not understand the language, he could not talk ; and even if he did understand it, his resolute silence made people believe that he did not understand, and so relieved him from the ungracious appearance of being purposely silent. Yet he was neither ungenial nor proud nor dull ; only reserved, shy, and with strangers difficult of speech.

Lennon had been in Switzerland once before, and had crossed this path of the Tête Noire. Perhaps the memory of that time was one reason why he wished now to retread the way alone. Then he was a college youth, revelling in the delights of a long holiday, and with all the world of scenery, and books, and companionship, and adventure, and passion opening on him ; now he trod the same path, a disappointed and, to some extent, a perverted man. Fate and his own fault had dealt somewhat heavily with him. Nearly all the lights which were beginning to flame up in the sky of his life when first he climbed this mountain path had gone out, one after the other. Only the love of nature and the love of books still remained clear and bright—not to be extinguished. "Friendship soon passed me like a ship at sea," is one of the fine lines of a poem which once promised greatness. Friendship had treated Lennon even worse than this. It was a ship which ran him down at sea when all seemed fair, and left him a wreck. Passion only led him to disappointment and something like despair. Then he raged for a while foolishly against the world, and men and women, and customs and creeds, and even, it may be, against Providence itself. And he flung his youth away ; and being designed for the Church, he distinguished himself by social lawlessness and theological rebellion, and was made an outlaw in the university sense. Then his fond and proud old father, who had made his money in trade, and longed to have his son a pillar of the Church, stormed against him, and flung him some money, and bade him go to the diggings, and use his hulking limbs in grubbing for gold ; and Lennon went to

Australia, and never saw his father again. His mother he had never seen. His birth (he was the only child) was her death. He ought to have devoted his life to replacing, so far as he could, the loss he had brought on his father; and his father died in the presence of strangers, his only son an exile, indeed an outcast.

After Lennon's departure his father threw all away. Of the money he had made not one stiver remained at his death. The old house in Cumberland where he had lived as a boy was the only scrap of property which his father's sudden death, intestate, bequeathed to his son. This was almost the only compensating consideration to Ralph Lennon—at least he did not profit by the death of the father to whom he had been so useless and disappointing a child.

Strangely enough, too, all he touched in Australia prospered with him. If he rented a few yards of river sand, gold straightway sparkled there. His speculations, generally made blindly, and for the mere sake of excitement, conquered the most tremendous odds, the most adverse chances, and succeeded. Twice he was swindled out of all he had by dishonest partners; but he made new combinations and experiments, and he became rich again. All this time he could not make up his mind to humble himself, and beg to be allowed to go to his father's house. He remained, always expecting a loving message and a summons. At last a message came, and a summons: his father was dead.

Then Lennon's heart was smitten. The change which whiten's a young man's hairs in a single night was not greater than that which fell upon him there in Australia. Enmity, rancour, suspicion, bitterness, dropped away from him, stricken by a sacred touch. He gave up money-making, and resolved to go home. If he could do any good in life by means of the money he had made, he would do it somewhere at home, near his father's grave.

He did not hurry home. There was nothing to hasten for. Perhaps, drawing nearer, he more and more felt inclined to shrink back and linger. At last he seized resolution by the hair, and said, "I will delay no longer; I will go at once."

So, having wandered thus a little off the direct track of our story, we come up with Ralph Lennon in the Pass of the Tête Noire. He had been wandering not a little, and not rarely, from the path. Now he scrambled up on this side to gather a

mountain flower ; now he descended deep among the solemn pines to have a better view of some torrent, the voice whereof, raving in the depths below, had caught his ear and fascinated him. Many times there came into his mind that wonderful line of Goethe's, perhaps the most perfect picture in little to be found in modern poetry, "*Es stürzt der Fels und über ihn die Fluth*,"—a line exhaustive and complete in its description of an Alpine pass, where it simply seems that the rocks have been suspended in the act of falling, and the flood, not to be stayed, rushes wildly over them.

But the clouds soon began to gather heavily and ominously round the mountains ; and soon, look where one might, he could see no peak of snow appearing. Gradually one could see little but the path before him and the pines on either side. Then the rain came down in torrents, and continued remorselessly. Lennon cared little about it ; he had camped out during many a rainy season in Australia ; and so he tramped along, regarding the complete change which the downpour and the steaming mist produced in the landscape as a new, unexpected, and charming transformation. He was getting wet to the skin ; but that mattered little, because he meant to walk on to Martigny, and there would be plenty of time for the day and himself to become perfectly dry before he reached the little town imbedded in the valley of the Rhone. From Chamounix to Martigny, most readers are well aware, is a good day's walk, and Lennon was not yet half-way to his journey's end.

Presently he heard voices on before him. He was not very glad of this, although he did not know that the fact could have any direct concern for him. But he became still less pleased when he heard English spoken. A little way ahead of him he saw a mule drawn up close to the side of the acclivity and under some pine-trees, apparently that its rider might have such slight shelter as the branches could give. There were two or three people he could see in the group which thus halted ; they had their backs turned to him. A lady sat on the mule ; and by her figure, and the splendid mass of dark hair he could see under her hat, he knew at a glance that she was Mrs. Alwyn. Her husband and a guide were with her.

There was nothing surprising in the meeting. People who are making a tour of Switzerland at the same time are always encountering each other in this way. Go where you will, you meet the same groups. But Lennon was not glad to see his

new friends here. Dr. Alwyn he liked ; but his first sensation on meeting a man he did not thoroughly know was always one of reluctance and discomfort. That first sensation over, it may be that he would enjoy the meeting very well afterwards. But intercourse with strangers, however agreeable he might expect them to prove, was always to Lennon like a cold bath. Let it prove ever so healthy and pleasant afterwards, be convinced as one may that it will prove healthy and pleasant, yet the first plunge is always a disagreeable performance.

Besides, Lennon did not much like Mrs. Alwyn. He thought her a mere fine lady, which indeed she was not ; and he hated fine ladies. Then again, she just turned her head as he came near, and saw him ; and he saw that her figure shrank together, slightly but perceptibly, as if she would gladly have avoided being seen by him. So she would too, at the time, if it were possible ; but not from any unkindly feeling—only for the woman's reason that she felt herself in an awkward and perhaps ridiculous position. She was perched on the back of a high mule, having a portmanteau strapped behind her ; and her hat and her clothes were very wet, and her hair was wet, and her feathers were as dragged as the plumage of a drowned crow. So for one instant she physically shrank at the idea of being caught in this pickle ; and she said to her husband in a low tone, which sounded like a mild protest against perverse fate, "O, my dear—Mr. Lennon !"

Dr. Alwyn was very glad of the meeting, and hailed Lennon cheerily.

"So we were destined not to part quite so soon, Mr. Lennon ! Very glad to meet you even here—under such disastrous circumstances. You come from Chamounix, of course ? So do we. How odd that we did not see you there ! And you were going on to Martigny ? So were we ; my wife riding, I walking ; and very pleasant it was until this downpour came on. Is it ever going to get fine ? The guide does not think it will change before sunset, and he advises us to stay at the hotel half-way, a little further on."

"O yes, dear ; we must stay.—Don't you think we had better, Mr. Lennon ?"

"Yes ; I think you had much better," said Lennon, giving what he considered perfectly honest advice, but at the same time hoping that he might be allowed to pursue his journey alone.

"Are you bent on going on?" asked Dr. Alwyn.

"Well, yes; I think so. The rain can't hurt me much. Indeed, I am used to even worse rain than this."

"It couldn't hurt me either," said the stout Doctor; "but Myra is tired, I know—tired of jolting on that old mule; and she is getting wet."

"Yes, dear; but I don't mind that—only the few things I have in the portmanteau will be quite soaked through if they get much more rain—and what am I to do then? We have nothing else nearer than Geneva."

"Quite true," said the Doctor; "we'll stay; it is much better."

He would have preferred going on; partly out of the natural restlessness of men, who like to push on without stopping to the end of every journey, and get it done; and partly, too, because a stout tramp over the mountain, with Lennon to talk to, would have been pleasant to him. Dr. Alwyn dearly and fondly loved his young wife, and she was much attached to him; but then she was only half his age, and he was full of robust, virile, almost rough energy; and he liked to talk of college times and ways—and, in short, the pair were not bound by that very rare supreme union of soul and nature which makes two people perpetually happy in the society of each other, and in that alone. Dr. Alwyn just now would have liked a few hours of the companionship of a man who was not the guide. But his wife's decided wishes, and the hint about the condition of literally nothing to wear to which much more rain might reduce her, were quite enough for him, and he ruled that the night should be spent in the seclusion of the *auberge* at the Tête Noire.

It was not much further on, and Lennon and the guide alike recommended pushing for it. But the portmanteau? Lennon recommended leaving the mule and the portmanteau with the guide, in such shelter as could be had, while madame and her husband walked on to the *auberge*, from which they could send back people with plenty of coverings to screen the portmanteau from the heaviest rain. That would be better for Mrs. Alwyn than waiting there in the cold and wet, motionless. But Mrs. Alwyn was very tired, and in fact was too wet to get off the mule and drag her clogged and heavy silks and velvets along the road. Then Lennon urged that they should all go on, braving all dangers, and letting the rain do its worst. There

really was nothing better—nothing else, in fact—to do. The rain did not appear likely to cease for hours. So Mrs. Alwyn made up her mind and switched her mule, and they all set off. Soon they became a merry party, and made fun of their meeting and their misadventures. Nothing makes people so friendly as a common drenching in a strange place. By the time they had reached the little hotel, Lennon had so completely thawed that he declared he would go no farther that night, and his companions were both glad of his decision.

They dined together, and were very pleasant. The calamity she dreaded had fallen on Mrs. Alwyn. Every stitch her portmanteau contained was thoroughly drenched, and she had to come to dinner in a cotton dress and an astonishingly frilled and trimmed white *jupon*, belonging to the landlady of the house, and obligingly offered as a loan for the occasion. And very pretty she looked, although the gown was made for a woman twice her bulk, and the petticoat trailed behind her when she walked, like a stage train. Lennon thought she looked far prettier than in her silks—and just think, ladies, what sort of creatures you bedizen yourselves for, after all!

As for the gentlemen, besides that both were constitutionally weather-proof, their rain-damage was comparatively slight. Outer coats laid aside, boots changed for borrowed slippers, and a quarter of an hour's personal drying at the stove, restored them to enduring condition.

"You won't banish me now, I hope?" said Mrs. Alwyn, when dinner was over. "As we are not in England, let us not be bound by English ways. You don't want me away, Mr. Lennon?"

"No, indeed, Mrs. Alwyn." And indeed he did not. "I have been so long out of England, and have lived so much lately in places where we dined off mutton and damper, eaten on pieces of board laid on our knees, and where there were no ladies, that I have almost forgotten the solemn old English ways. I really hardly knew at first why you talked of leaving the room."

"Then I am not to be banished? I am very glad—all the more so as there is here no place to banish me to, except my bedroom, and it is such a toil, getting up there in these clothes, that I don't feel able to encounter it more than once in the course of the night."

So she stayed and talked a good deal, and made both gentle-

men very happy. There was a piano in the room, feeble of tone and rattling of keys, but still a piano ; and Dr. Alwyn asked his wife to sing for them, which she did very readily. She sang sweetly—first one or two little hymns, for which it must be owned Lennon did not much care, but in which Dr. Alwyn delighted ; then two or three rather scientific affairs, for which neither the one nor the other cared a straw. Lennon's mind was far away all the time, as he sat at the window and looked at the black pines, over which, the rain-stream having at last ceased to pour, the moon was beginning to shine.

"Sing us some of your old English ballads, Myra," said Dr. Alwyn ; "they are fine music, and at all events one understands them."

"Perhaps Mr. Lennon does not care for old English ballads ?" said Myra, turning half round from the piano in appeal to our friend.

"Indeed, I like the ballad music best of all. Like Dr. Alwyn, I understand it. I suppose the mind of the listener must always help to make the music, must it not ? Mine can make nothing for me out of the more scientific strains."

"In other words, you have not been in the least delighted by what I have been singing ?"

Asked so directly, Lennon could not frame a quick and polite evasion, and so answered calmly, "Indeed, not in the least."

Dr. Alwyn and his wife smiled at the truthfulness, and even the latter was pleased with it.

She sang them one or two English ballads—soft, tender, sweet, melodious ; not reaching, perhaps, any great musical heights, nor ranging over a great variety of expression ; not endowed with the penetrating, passionate, quick-glancing emotion of the ballad-music of Ireland or Scotland, or even Wales ; but homely, truthful, and touching—music which might find an echo in any manly or womanly and unconventional heart. Lennon listened with real pleasure, and had now courage even to press for more. So she began another with words which made some old-fashioned traditional complaint about the suddenness with which love grows cold when its first glow is over. It was not the song of a cynic, nor had it sprung from the bosom of a doubting age ; but was the honest heart-complaint of an English nature at a time when the delusion that love suddenly changes was a sincere, accepted, lamented faith.

The song from its very first line seemed to move Lennon deeply. He raised his hand at once, as if about to stop the singer and ask her some question ; but he checked himself in time, and waited until its last echo had ceased. There was then silence.

"Don't you like it ?" asked Mrs. Alwyn.

"Yes ; I like it much, very much," Lennon replied. "And it is an old, old friend of mine."

"Indeed ! Then you can tell me whose it is, or where it is to be found. I only sing it, words and air and all, from memory."

"No ; I cannot tell you anything about it except that I used to hear it once, and was very fond of it. May I ask, Mrs. Alwyn, where you heard it ? I have not heard it for years, except when I have tried sometimes to hum or whistle it myself away in Australia."

"I only heard it sung by a gentleman who belongs, or at least did belong, to our part of the country ; a friend of Dr. Alwyn's—or, perhaps, I ought to say an acquaintance. You know, Alwyn dear,—Mr. Warton. He sang it ; and you liked it so much—and he promised to bring the music and the words, but he never did."

If the lamps had been brighter, if Lennon had not kept his face turned to the window, any one present might have seen at half a glance that the name was no commonplace sound to him. He said, without turning round—

"Not Walter Warton—Walter Raleigh Warton ?"

"Yes, indeed, that is his absurd name—Walter Raleigh ! Do you know him ?"

"I did know him. We were at school together, and at college. I have not heard of him this long time. I—I hope he is doing well ?"

"Yes, I think so," interposed Dr. Alwyn. "He is becoming rather a great man, in fact—a sort of great little man. He is a popular speaker and agitator, and whenever he addresses a public meeting he is cheered ; and when he comes to a country town there is sure to be a row about him one way or the other. He is very clever indeed, quite a brilliant speaker—of the flash-and-rattle kind. He is sure to get into Parliament soon ; the Tories have made quite a pet of him."

"The Tories ! A pet of Walter Warton ? He used to be a wild Radical—a Republican—a sort of Red Revolutionist."

"Yes, I daresay: so were we all when at college, or emerging from it. At least, those who are Radicals now were furious Tories and State-Church and Divine Right True-Blues then; and those who, like Warton, were Red Republicans then are steady Tories now. But I don't think Warton is a steady Tory: indeed, I can't quite make him out. He is a great champion of the working man, and all that sort of thing—on the platform a kind of spouting Jules Simon; but he is now also the pet of the Tories, and he says his mission is to form an alliance between Toryism and Democracy. I'm sure I wish him joy. I wish they would get married, and go for a long honeymoon to the Continent, or anywhere else: I don't think England wants either."

"It is a singular change," said Lennon. "I have been too long out of the way of English politics to understand it. But—do you know Warton's wife?"

"His wife?" Mrs. Alwyn asked. "No; has he a wife?"

"Yes, he has—he had at least." Lennon's voice was indistinct as he spoke. "I knew her—once."

"He never spoke to us of his wife: indeed, we never knew that he was married. But we are not intimate: in fact, Dr. Alwyn, though he is too charitable to say it, does not much like Mr. Warton: and then he lives in London, and seldom comes our way."

"Well, we are very good friends," said Dr. Alwyn, "when we meet. I chaff him a little sometimes, and he takes it good-humouredly, and answers in splendid sentences. He would declaim on your hearthrug, if you listened to him. I almost think I did hear, somewhere or other, about Warton's being married, but I had forgotten all about it. He certainly never said anything to me about his wife. Perhaps she is dead."

"O, Alwyn!" These two words Myra spoke in a voice so low that there was "nothing lived betwixt it and silence." Her husband looked interrogatively, but said not a word. He did not know what indiscretion he had committed, and had too much sense to ask; but his man's sense was not a woman's quick perception.

The singing and playing and talk were over for that night. Mrs. Alwyn presently took her leave of Lennon, and, gathering her trailing petticoats about her, went upstairs to bed. Her husband was not given to early going to bed, and as the moon

looked bright he said he would have a saunter with Lennon along the mountain path. When he came downstairs ready for a tramp, he found to his surprise that Lennon stood at the inn-door with his knapsack on his back and his stick in his hand.

"Good-bye, Dr. Alwyn—at least for the present; I am going."

"Not going away? Not going to cross the mountain to-night?"

"Yes, indeed. I find there is a very early train from Martigny to Lausanne in the morning, and I can easily catch it if I start now."

"But I thought you meant to pass the night here?"

"So I did: but I did not then know of the possibility of getting on in the morning. And I want to get straight on to England as fast as possible—I must go."

"But to cross the mountain at night—what a performance! 'Beware the pine-tree's withering branch—beware the awful avalanche!' Don't you remember the unfortunate young man in Longfellow? Take care that the pious monks of St. Bernard don't find you at break of day stretched lifeless on some crag side."

"Not much chance of that: the path winds clear and straight along; a man could hardly miss it if he were blind. The difficulty would be not to keep it. The moon will shine for some time yet, and then comes the dawn."

"Well, if you will go, I'll walk half a mile or so with you; but I am sorry you have to set off in so precipitate a way. You will be in Cumberland long before we get there. Our journey home will be an affair of very easy stages."

"I don't know that I shall be in Cumberland so very soon. I have to stay a few days in London. By the way, we were talking of your friend Walter Raleigh Warton——" Lennon stopped in his speech and looked down.

"Yes. I don't know that I can exactly call him my friend: but I meet him sometimes—rarely of late. Some of our Cumberland folks are rather proud of him, especially when they see his name in the *Morning Post's* list of the guests at some fashionable gathering. But what of him?"

"I am anxious to meet him. I knew him once, as I told you, pretty well; and I should be glad to see him again. You said, I think, that you knew nothing of his family—of his wife?"

"Nothing whatever."

"I think you said that perhaps his wife was dead. Had you any reason to suppose so—any vague recollection, even, of having heard something——"

"Indeed no, not the least: I said the words in pure idleness—only as a sort of random conjecture. Pray, if you have any interest in Warton or his family, don't be made uneasy by anything I may have said. I had no reason whatever for it. And Myra looked at me rather horrified, I can tell you."

Lennon's colour deepened.

"Do you think I can easily find out Warton's whereabouts when I get to London?"

"Yes, quite easily. People of course will be out of town just now; but you will find it the easiest thing in the world to learn all about him. Anybody interested in politics, any newspaper man, any Tory member of parliament, any secretary of a working-men's association, can put you on his track. If it were only a little later in the year, I should recommend you simply to walk through the streets until you came to some huge placard announcing a meeting, with Walter Raleigh Warton as one of the leading speakers."

"Thank you. I shall find him. And now you must not come any farther." They had reached a point where the path began to descend, and soon turned sharply round the shoulder of a hill. Below them lay the deep valley, its pines far down looking like toy trees. The white cloud-masses with the moonlight on them showed like the snowpeaks which had gone out of the landscape with the sun.

"Good-bye. Remember Excelsior's fate, and don't let any avalanche rob us of the pleasure of having you for a neighbour."

"Never fear; we shall meet again."

Lennon turned round the corner of the ridge, and disappeared.

"I like him," spoke Dr. Alwyn aloud, and with emphasis. And he walked back to the hotel.

He sat reading for some time, and then went upstairs to bed. To his surprise, he found his wife, who was generally a good sleeper, broad awake. He stooped over and kissed her. Very pretty she looked in her white night-dress. Does not Madame de Sevigné say it is woman's prettiest garb?

"Alwyn, dear," said she, without giving him time to say a word, "where is Mr. Lennon gone?"

"Across the mountain. Won't be stayed ; is resolved to catch the first train in the morning from Martigny. But how did you know, my little sleepless watcher, that he had gone anywhere?"

"I saw him, I saw you both, out of the window. I went to look out, and of course I observed that he had his knapsack, and was evidently going away altogether."

"Well, you are quite right ; he would go. I suppose he has stayed too long in Switzerland."

"No, Alwyn, dear, it's not that ; it's you who have sent him on his way in such haste."

"I, dearest?—I? On the contrary, I wanted him not to go."

"You dear, stupid thing, you sent him off with three or four words, when you spoke of Warton's wife, and said, 'Perhaps she is dead.'"

"Why, what have those words to do with driving him over the mountain?"

"Ah, that I don't quite know ; but he became alarmed when you said it, and made up his mind to go that very moment. He will travel day and night until he reaches England."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Doctor, uplifting hands and eyes in feigned awe and alarm. "The witchcraft of these women! How does my wife know what Mr. Lennon is resolved in his secret mind to do?—a man she had never seen the week before last."

"Because your wife has eyes, dear."

"Yes, that she has." Two gleaming soft dark orbs were looking up at him, and dropped their lids with a smile at his interjected compliment. "But I still don't understand how, with any power of eye, you could have seen all this."

"Well, dearest, I may be quite wrong ; but I think—perhaps, you know, that Mr. Lennon may have cared about Walter Warton's wife—may have been in love with her perhaps—before she married."

"O, *that* is it, you think? Well, I should never have thought of it. Perhaps it is so. Poor fellow! I wish I had not said those foolish words. But who could have supposed that he would attach any importance to them? or who indeed could have guessed that the matter could in any possible way concern him. Your explanation looks very fanciful, Myra."

“It is true, dear.”

So it was. The few words spoken at random by Dr. Alwyn had in very truth sent Lennon speeding over the mountain, resolved to make no stop or stay until he reached England.

Perhaps she is dead! Well, what then? Wherein did that affect him so deeply? Years ago—ever so many, it now seemed—he loved her, and he thought she loved him, and he was disappointed. She was a religiously-educated girl, firm in her sect and in her narrow piety: and he became odiously distinguished for his free ways of thought. She and her people were strong too in their horror of vice, even in the mild form of youthful extravagance: and did *he* not win a name for lawlessness? What wonder if she turned from him and married a better man? Who could blame her? If he had promise of any kind, he had not fulfilled it; if he had talents, he threw them away. What right has a fellow to expect that a girl will give herself up, heart and soul and body, to the protection and faith of one who cannot take care of himself, and does not seem to have any faith in himself? Truly, when girls really love a man, they *do* such things; they throw their arms round his neck and leap with him into the struggles of life, as they would leap into the sea or go through the flames for him and with him. *She* did not love him so; that was clear enough. She was calm and composed, quite able to see what she called her duty, and to follow it; and he justified her decision by immediately flinging himself out of society, and making a fool and a rebel and a reproach of himself. He had nothing to complain of; and as it was evident she did not love him, he had nothing to regret. She was married, and, if living, was doubtless happy, and had forgotten him.

If living! But the mere random words which just hinted at the possibility of her being dead pierced him like a sword; for he had come back from Australia partly to see her, though he did not own the intention to himself. He thought that years and change and struggle and much excitement and some suffering had purged away the vehemence of the old love, as they had gradually expelled the influence of the other passions of youth; and he hoped that he could see her with calmness and be her friend, as he would be her husband's friend again for her sake. In Australia he had for some years petulantly avoided looking at any newspapers from the north of England which might contain tidings of the old places familiar to him;

and therefore he knew nothing about the career of his old colleague Warton. He had perhaps vague romantic notions about the possibility of Warton and his wife being poor, and about his contriving somehow to share with them the money which had grown up to him, and being splendidly generous and consequently happy. Perhaps he was not so very glad—so purely and unreservedly glad—when he heard that his successful and happy rival was not in a way to need generosity ; that he had prospered in life as well as in love ; that he was a sort of great man, with his name, as Mürger would say, “ in the playbill :” while he, Ralph Lennon, was utterly obscure and unknown, his talents, which were once thought promising and rich, having conducted him to nothing. Lennon might have felt a bitterness rise up in his heart but for the sudden words which suggested the chance of her death. This he had never thought of. He always pictured her young, bright, and blooming, as he used to see her ; or beautiful, sorrowful, and pitying, as when last she listened to his wild appeals and passionate implorings, and shed tears over them, but was not to be softened by them. Seeing her again, he thought, would be like looking once more upon the vision of his own youth. But it seemed as strange and shocking to him to think that he might never see her again as to think of a life which had death for its final stage. So, though in a moment after he was calm enough to see that the ominous words had no significance, he yet determined that nothing should delay him now—that he would travel straight on, night and day, until he reached London, found out Warton, frankly offered him his hand, and bade him to forget the old bitter quarrel of ten years ago.

Nay, he sometimes—and especially as he marched along in the moonlight and the shadow, and with the night-wind’s rush among the pines still sounding sadly in his ears—he sometimes even fancied there was something peculiar which called him to England. How was it that on the Lake of Zug, where he was staying only for its seclusion, he should have fallen in with two from the very spot whither he was tending ? How was it that, wherever he went in Switzerland, he still met them ? How was it that, when he sat with them alone for once, and the lady chose to sing, she sang a song which brought up such memories to him, and led to such questions, and so to the utterance of the very words which thrilled him ? In all this was there nothing ominous and mysterious ? Yes, there was

something, as long as the night lasted ; but when morning flushed over the whole scene, and the birds sang, and the pines looked no longer spectral, and children with baskets of wild raspberries met the pedestrian at every turn, and the exquisite valley of the Rhone shone in its sunny beauty at his feet, and he could at last see the old tower of Martigny perched upon its crag, the spell of the ominous words forsook him, and could not be recalled. His resolution not to lag did not desert him with it. He remained but a few minutes in Martigny, and with the first train swept along the shore of the Lake of Geneva to Lausanne ; thence to Geneva itself ; and thence from the poetry of nature into its brisk prose—from Switzerland into France.

Dr. Alwyn and his wife were still lounging along the Chillon road, the wife fascinated by the Byronian castle, the husband absorbed in contemplation of the lake and the snows of the serrated Dent du Midi, when the voice of a guard wakened up a sleepy passenger alone in a first-class carriage just arriving at London Bridge station ; and Ralph Lennon staggered out upon the platform, and, rubbing his eyes, knew himself once more at home in England.

His first feelings were not those of exultation ; indeed, far from it—he shuddered. It was cold, it was foggy, it was raining. All at once he remembered that the day he left England it was cold, foggy, and raining likewise. No doubt it was the same fog and the same shower. “In tears our last farewell was taken ; and now in tears we meet again.” Accustomed for some years back to warm skies and bright suns, the dingy atmosphere and the raw cold air—raw and cold, though autumn was yet young—seemed to chill him to the marrow. What a beautiful halo always used to hang over England when he looked back upon her through the telescope of his memory across the Pacific ! Even in his moods of anger, when he stormed inwardly against home and all that belonged to it, yet how agonizingly beautiful it seemed !—beautiful as a faithless mistress, whom we curse in the bitterness of our heart, and yet love so passionately. Now that he was actually in England again, what a dreary, vulgar, commonplace, disheartening sort of home it looked ! His heart went down like the mercury in a glass when a chill comes.

“Disappointment number one,” he said to himself. “This is dreadful. All the better : it will help to prepare me for dis-

appointment number two, and three, and so on through all the rest, which I suppose are sure to follow."

He took a railway-porter into council, and inquired about hotels. Several houses of which he had rather a genial memory were gone long ago, he found. Great caravanseries were everywhere being substituted. The porter recommended one which he named. Lennon knew it by name, for he had been reading a stray *Times* now and then on his homeward journey, and he saw columns of letters appearing day after day in denunciation of this particular hostelry; of its rooms, its "lifts," its charges, its manners; the savage ferocity of its barmaid, the withering scorn of its waiters, the haughty indifference of its boots.

"Good," said Lennon grimly. "I'll go there. Nothing shall be wanting. I'll have a whole bath of discomfort to begin with; and then, perhaps, when the first shock is over, things may begin to feel better. There's no place like home; and I'll have as many of its peculiar joys as I can all at once. Is the luggage all up? Then drive to the Eleanor's Cross Hotel."

CHAPTER III.

TOM BERRY OF SOUTHWARK.

RALPH LENNON set himself to work at once to find out his old companion Walter Warton. The time, however, was not favourable for discovering anybody in London. No Directory contained any hint of Warton's whereabouts; and it was the dull season as regarded meetings, and no placards on the walls announced great political gatherings of any kind. The few people with whom Lennon had any manner of acquaintance in town all knew Warton's name and something of his public character, but nothing about his private residence. One evening, however, as Lennon passed down the Strand, he saw on a hoarding a small placard announcing in letters of very modest size a meeting of the working men of some trade or other, to discuss some question between masters and men which happened just then to affect their branch of industry. "Come," thought Ralph; "if Warton be the sort of man I have heard of, these people, or some of them, are sure to know all about him." So he found out the place of meeting (in a back street,

East-end), and he "assisted" at the proceedings. "The public" were "respectfully invited to attend," in order to hear the grievances of the workmen exposed; and Ralph Lennon constituted the public. So far as he could judge, no other creature not an artisan of some kind was present.

The room was small, badly ventilated, badly lighted, and densely crowded; yet Lennon became interested in the "proceedings," and sat them out. The meeting was conducted with the utmost order, although it was of course both noisy and demonstrative. There was but little of the sort of eloquence which he expected to hear; there was hardly a word said about the rights of man, or the rights of labour, or serfdom, or the tyrant capitalist. The speakers seemed for the most part to go in for argument; and a rough practical emulation in prompt logic between each successive orator and those whom he addressed was the great game of the night; for, although the meeting was entirely made up of working men, there was by no means a complete class-unanimity among them. Some boldly contended that the alleged grievance was no grievance at all; some went so far as to espouse the side of the masters. There were evidently conservative minds and capitalist minds among these working men as well as among their social superiors. The utter absence of the imaginative and the ideal qualities, the unconscious instinctive adhesion to the concrete and the practical, which usually make the average Briton so successful and so uninteresting, showed with peculiar force at this meeting.

One man only—and he was somewhat older than most of the other speakers—made any appeal to rights and wrongs, and essayed an occasional flight of democratic eloquence. Most of the others were quite young; he was upwards of forty. He was a great strong man, with an eager face, and hair already grizzling. He denounced social inequalities and class legislation with vehemence, and in language which, but for its occasionally high-flown style and misplaced grandiloquence of phrase betraying the uneducated or the self-educated man, might have done very well for a much more pretentious platform.

Lennon felt strangely attracted by this man, though the somewhat old-fashioned and obsolete rhetoric of denunciation in which he indulged made the listener smile. Especially warm did the speaker become when he railed at his own class for their apathy and selfishness.

"Don't tell me," he exclaimed, "of your model working man,

who only looks after his wife and his family, and never listens to the voice of the political agitator. I call the model working man a selfish humbug an' a sneak. When old England was great, she wasn't made great by model men of any kind—fellows who only care to have good blankets to lie in, an' to be patted on the head by their superiors. D'ye think the twelve Apostles were model working men that only thought of mindin' their business? Believe me, fellow working men, when a patron or a swell of any kind praises you for not running after politics and for holding aloof from strikes, he only wants to flatter and cajole you out of looking for what's lawfully and properly your rights, according to the grand old doctrines of the Constitution and the broad principles of humanity."

There was much more in the same strain, accompanied with some energy of gesticulation. The face of the speaker was very remarkable. It was dark, stubbly, scrubby, with stiff, broom-like, tufty hair, cut short, and standing up in all irregular ways about his temples. He had shaggy eyebrows, and high cheek-bones, and a great broad mouth, and a black beard without whiskers, his face was white and lank, and scored with rugged lines. The eyes were bright and full and kindly, and there was sometimes a wonderful softness and simplicity about the great mouth, when its lines subsided into placidness. The figure of the man was strong but awkward; he had great long arms and large hands, with blunted fingers.

The meeting did not respond very cordially to the appeals of this speaker. He seemed an anachronism there, somehow. But Lennon liked him, if only for his old-fashioned discontent and class-bitterness. Our friend resolved to wait until the meeting closed, and then speak to the orator. "He is my man," thought Lennon; "if anybody here can put me on Warton's track, he can."

So, when the proceedings were over, and the room began rapidly to thin, Lennon went up to this man, who was standing in excited talk with a little knot of his comrades, and touched him on the shoulder.

"May I say a word to you?" he asked.

The man came at once, and very civilly, into a quiet corner of the room.

Ralph went to the point of his business at once. "Do you," he asked, "know anything of Mr. Warton—Walter Raleigh Warton?"

The man's brow darkened in a moment. "Yes," he replied ; "I know him—damn him !"

"Pray, my friend," rejoined Lennon very coolly, "don't be so rude as to damn anybody who may happen to be the long-lost brother of the person you are speaking to. Walter Warton is not my brother ; but he used to be a friend of mine, and I cannot in decency hear him 'damned' without quarrelling with the damner ; and I don't want to quarrel—I want a little very harmless information, and if you can give it to me without unnecessary swearing, you will really very much oblige a man and a brother."

The good-humoured raillery of Lennon's tone brought its natural and genial expression back into the working man's face. "I'm sure I beg your pardon," he said, with simple gentlemanliness of manner ; "I didn't exactly mean any offence, though I ought to have known that such language must be an offence, even if Warton wasn't a friend of yours—which I'm sorry to hear. But all I know about him lately is that he's proved a humbug and a sneak, and he's sold himself to the Tories."

"Well, I heard that he had become a Tory. But a man may change his opinions honestly, may he not ?"

"He may, if he doesn't gain by it ; if he doesn't get taken up by swells and patted on the back, and asked to their dinners, and trotted out on their platforms. Never mind. Wat Warton's a fool—a double fool. The Tories will make a tool of him, and throw him away ; and I know working men that subscribed their shillings—ay, and their pounds—for him when he stood for the borough over—" (the speaker jerked his head to indicate locality) ; "yes, and that lost their jobs of work—for days and days to work for him—and that would spit at him now, if he was to come on that platform. He'll fall between the two stools, mind you. Tell Wat Warton that : and tell him, if you like, that Tom Berry of Southwark said so. I'm Tom Berry—he'll know me, never fear."

"Well, Tom Berry, I shan't tell him anything of the sort. I have not seen him for years, and I only want to see him now in order to find out something about his family, to whom I wish very well. If you can tell me where he is to be found I will owe you a good turn."

"Yes ; I can tell you where he's to be found, if he's in town. I know his place well. Many a time I've been there arranging for meetings of working men and all that, and many

a time I've thought he talked like an angel there. It's in the Temple. He has chambers there ; but somebody else's name remains up, because he doesn't want to have all sorts of people dropping in upon him. If you're going that way now, I am, and I'll show you the place ; for I don't remember the name or the number."

Lennon was very glad of the offer, and began to take an interest in his new friend. They walked together towards Fleet-street.

"Those men who spoke to-night," asked Ralph, "were they much of politicians? They did not seem to be."

"No ; they were not. They're not the sort of men that Wat Warton could work upon. London is not much of a place for sound politics—what I call sound politics—among working men. Unless such as, like myself, are old enough to have the Chartist leaven in them, they don't much care. London's a dead-and-alive place for politics. The bad lot of our younger men here drink, and have dog-fights and ratting matches, and kick their wives, and all that ; the good sort go to chapel and lectures, and become members of temperance societies, and are taught to let politics alone ; and a few of them are Unitarians, and have Views of Life, sir, do you understand?" he spoke with humorous emphasis—"Views of Life ; and [they are too high up in the clouds to care about votes and elections and all that sort of thing. They're good fellows, too, and one can't but like them,—we had few such, I can tell you when I was a young workman,—but they're chips in porridge so far as politics go. London's a dead old place. I'm sick of it. It's different in the North—in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Wat Warton's great there, I can tell you—at least he used to be. Perhaps they've found him out before now, as I have. But the North's the place. 'Ave you ever bin there?"

"Yes ; I come from the North—that is, from Cumberland, the Lancashire border."

"Ah, yes ; I see. Wat Warton comes from there, I recollect. I worked a good deal in the North myself at one time. But you've not come lately from there, or you'd know more about him?"

"No ; I come from Australia."

"From Australia? Maybe from Victoria?"

"Yes, indeed—from Victoria."

"Ah, they've universal suffrage there?"

"Something like it, at least."

"That's the place I'd like to live in. Where a man is a man, don't you know? He was a humbug the man who wrote that, too, with his 'good time coming.' Ah, if I was once *there* you wouldn't catch me coming back *here*."

By this time they had reached the Temple; and after some peering at the lists of names on door-posts under dim lamp-light, Tom Berry at last showed Lennon a set of chambers on the ground-floor, and told him these were Warton's. Then he bade him good-night.

"I should like to see you again some time," said Lennon, as he held out his hand in leave-taking.

"I'm to be heard of or found at evenings in the reading-room where you saw me to-night," Berry replied, in a tone which, however friendly, meant to say: "I am only a working man, but I don't go hanging after swells. If they want me they call on me, that's all."

Lennon quite understood the meaning of the tone, and rather liked it.

"I shall be quite sure to find you out," he said. "I want to have a little more talk with you. I am a stranger to English politics, and you can tell me all about them."

"Ay, ay, I think I can do that right enough; I've paid pretty dear for my learning in that school, and wish sometimes I knew as little of its teaching as the baby at the breast. Good night. You'll not find Wat Warton in now, I'm thinking; and if you take my advice you'll never look after him any more."

Berry nodded, and disappeared in the darkness of the Temple courts. His white, eager face, as he looked back a moment, seemed ghostly. In Lennon's mind the odd thought arose that his late companion was indeed like the ghost of that Chartism which used to live once, and shake the country with its loud, defiant tread, but which had long since fallen dead, and been laid in the dust of the grave. And Lennon, whose later years in England before his exile had been a season of social, literary, and theological Chartism, felt a thrill of something like affinity and pitying brotherhood towards the poor fellow who had just left him. He paused a moment in thought, and then knocked at the door of the old companion whom he had not seen for so many years, and from whom he had parted in bitterness.

It was a relief to him to find that Warton was not in. A smartly-dressed boy, a cross-breed between page and clerk, opened the door, and told him his master was not likely to be home until late. Ralph wrote a few lines, announcing in the friendliest manner his arrival in England, giving his town address at the grim hostelry already mentioned, and adding that he would call again and endeavour to see Warton before he went northward.

Next morning he was at breakfast in the coffee-room, when Warton, looking young, smooth, and dainty as ever—not apparently having added one day to his age—walked in and glanced sharply from table to table. Lennon rose and went to meet him. There was a cordial greeting, and each congratulated the other on his looks, and on his not having grown any older. But Lennon had seen enough to feel convinced that if he had not risen and come forward his old acquaintance would never have recognized him. To be sure, he wore a great beard, and his once bright complexion had darkened; but there still was the fact,—Warton's eye had rested distinctly and inquiringly on him as he sat at the table, and until he rose and came forward Warton did not know him.

There was little time for exchange of ideas, even if much interchange of that kind had been likely just then. Warton was leaving town immediately; his cab was at the door. He was going to stay a few days at Coombe Castle, and came to insist on Ralph's giving him a night at his chambers in the Temple immediately on his return, which Ralph promised to do. Warton asked if Ralph meant to remain in England, and was told he did; asked him what he meant to do with himself, which Ralph answered with a shrug of the shoulders and the word "Nothing."

"By Jove! Lucky fellow! Brought home wealth from the Antipodes?"

"Wealth enough for *me*. I have worked my time, and now I mean to rest."

"O, you shan't rest, I promise you! We'll find something for you to do. *Repose ailleurs* is our motto here just now. I am so much concerned that I have to go out of town to-day. But I am immersed in politics, and I am not a Croesus from the colonies who can afford to rest. Good-bye—for the hour. You'll not fail to come that night; we will have a long talk over old times."

Lennon winced a little at the allusion to old times. It was only as Warton was actually going that he asked after Warton's wife.

"Mabel is perfectly well, I am glad to say, now. Her health is not always very good, and we have, therefore, to find a little place in the country for her and the children. She does not like town; it does not agree with her, this hideous atmosphere, or with the children. It will be a pleasure to her to hear of your return to England."

With the words, Warton pressed his friend's hand gently yet fervently, then jumped into his cab, waved his white hand, and drove away.

Ralph Lennon sauntered listlessly, vacuously, back into the breakfast-room. He looked out of the window; he took up a sheet of the *Times* and glanced gravely down its columns, and was not aware, until a waiter handed him another sheet, that he had been attentively studying the supplement. Then he looked through the columns of news for form's sake, his mind taking in nothing which presented itself at the mind's glass door, the eye. He put the paper down at last, relieved to be decently rid of it. Then he lounged into the smoking-room, and was glad to find it vacant. He sat in a rocking-chair, lighted a cigar, smoked, and began to think.

A blank, cold disappointment had fallen on him. Why? He did not know. What had he expected or wanted? He could not guess. Perhaps people returning home after long absence generally expect to find the home more actively and dramatically interested about their return than it is. Perhaps the friendly, easy reception with which Warton had greeted him was not exactly what Lennon expected. The impression with which it left him was certainly one of entire personal insignificance. He might come or go, and the old friends or old enemies were unconcerned. Perhaps the real secret of the blank lay in the four or five days which must intervene before Lennon could meet his old acquaintance again, and hear even a word of his old love. He might as well have been for these days still in Switzerland or in Algeria or in Melbourne. So near, and yet so far! It was a vexation and a disappointment—all the more so because he could hardly embody it in distinct thoughts and look it fixedly in the face.

So, if he remained in town, there were at least five days before him with nothing to do; and his only acquaintances in

London a few colonial agents, the town partner of a northern attorney, and a Chartist working man.

"No," he said, and he rose from his chair and flung away his cigar with a burst of determination; "I could never stand it. I'll go down to Cumberland at once, and have a look at the old place; and I'll be back in time to meet him. Nobody wants me here just now,—or anywhere, indeed, for that matter. But I can't spend five days dragging through these hideous streets, and looking out of these dreary windows. I'll go and see the poor old place again."

CHAPTER IV

WALTER WARTON'S HOME.

TWENTY miles to the south of London, on a railway which runs to the sea, there lies a pretty town, which, unlike most other small and old towns, had grown considerably through its proximity to the line. It happens too often that when a railway passes close to such a town it only sweeps up and runs away with whatever poor little business the place may once have had. The tourist, the commercial traveller, the agent, the locomotive business man of any kind, who must some years ago have stayed a night there if he had anything whatever to do in the town, now makes his arrangements to get through his affairs in a couple of hours, and is off by the evening train somewhere else. But the town which is now to be spoken of had had the rare good luck to make a special profit of that which had been the commercial ruin of so many of its fellows. In fact, it was fortunate enough to be exactly suitable as a home for the families of a large class of Londoners, who liked to stow their wives and children, and after business hours themselves, just as far away from the city of smoke and fog as it was possible to get to in time for a late dinner or a substantial tea. It is the fond mania of a great number of nice, soft, motherly women that health cannot possibly be had for their children or themselves if they do not live quite out of London; and although, as a matter of fact, a small semi-rural town is usually about the worst-drained and most insalubrious sort of place engendered by modern civilization, and

although, as a whole, our much-abused metropolis is one of the healthiest places man, woman, or child can abide in, yet it will take some generations before the majority of British mothers get to know that a well-drained lane is a better place to live in than a damp hill-side or the neighbourhood of a marshy meadow. So this little town we are now talking of became a favourite *succursale*, or chapel of ease, to London ; and a little removed from its original cluster of queer, quaint, ancient, and grass-grown streets, lined with houses of red brick, there soon grew up a perfect colony of detached and semi-detached villas, with stucco fronts and plate-glass windows, and tall rows of steps, on either side of which stood for adornment plaster urns filled with flowers.

For the most part these tenements were, in their external character, as mild, monotonous, and conventional as the soberest Briton could desire. They were brick-and-stucco symbols of respectability. One could almost imagine an irregular and poetic fancy taking cold and dying at the bare sight of them. But here and there, a little off the track of this mournful colony of propriety, there were some irregular and almost fantastic houses, erected probably by some builder who, naturally eccentric, had been driven to downright madness at last by the weary sight of conventionality all around. The eccentric houses, be it said, were generally smaller than the respectable buildings. When a man gets a good income in England, and can pay a decent rent for a house, he is as little likely to affect eccentricity in a residence as his wife to display it in her clothes. One of the very prettiest, and also one of the smallest, of the new houses was an odd little lodge built in graceful imitation of the old style which was real and substantial in the town itself, and having, therefore, so much of local excuse and local colouring to atone for what Mr. Ruskin might probably consider the insincerity of its principles. It was long, low, with heavy old-English porch, and plenteously overgrown with ivy. Its windows were lattices ; it had gables and weathercocks ; and not a square inch of stucco was to be seen anywhere about it. At its back was a garden rich in apple-trees and strawberry-beds and the vine ; in front was a sunny scrap of well-mown grass, a smooth-shaven green, which only a wooden paling divided from the road.

At the close of a beautiful evening in late September, two ladies and two children were in this scrap of ground. The

children, a fine boy of seven and a girl a year or two older, were playing with a curly little dog. The elder of the ladies was leaning on the railings and looking anxiously up the road. By the word "elder" we must not be understood to mean that either of the two was old, or elderly, or even approaching to elderliness. But the lady who counted most years—perhaps some thirty-odd—was very plump and matronly; a handsome woman, but falling fast into that flesh-development which used to make poor Hawthorne shudder when he noticed the immature obesity of our English dames. She was fair and bright-complexioned; indeed her cheeks glowed even with the late and mild kisses of the September sun. She now and then turned away from the railings, and walked up and down the little lawn; and she walked heavily and breathed rather shortly. Just a little less flesh, and she might have been stately; a little more sprightliness of movement, and she might have been a plump Hebe some time advanced in matronhood. Her companion was fair, like herself, and bright-cheeked; but she was slender and shapely, with unresting, beaming brown eyes and a step of elastic vigour; and she was perhaps, at most, some twenty years of age.

"He is not coming by this train, Mabel," said the younger woman, looking up the road; "everybody has come, quarter of an hour ago."

They were aunt and niece; but not being divided by the usual difference of years in such relationships, the aunt was always "Mabel" to the niece.

"No, I suppose not," Mabel said with something like a sigh. "He is sometimes delayed, you know, on the way from the station. People get talking to him, and keep him standing where their roads divide. But I don't think he's coming by this train. He will come by the next; and I think I'm glad of it, for the children will be in bed then, and we'll put on our bonnets and go to meet him."

"The next train is the last for the night?" the niece inquired with a little emphasis.

"Yes, the last for the night. But he'll come in that train, you need not doubt. He said he would."

"O, he *said* he would." This was spoken somewhat doubtfully—coldly, indeed.

Mabel did not notice the expression conveyed by the tone, or would not acknowledge it. Indeed this good lady had an

absence of appreciation of sarcasm or even irony which piety itself must have commended.

"Mamma, is papa coming home to-night?" cried the little boy.

"Yes, Wat, he is. Are you not glad?"

"O, yes, mamma—very glad, if he comes; for you know he promised to show me how to mend my horse, and it's ever so long ago now. How do you know he's coming, mamma?"

"Because he said so, dear."

"O, but then he said so before, mamma, many nights, you know; and I stayed up for him, and he didn't come."

"Your papa is much engaged, my dear, and cannot always come."

"O!" And there was another pause for reflection, while the infantile mind was gathering up a fresh argument suited to the change of position. "But then, mamma, people oughtn't to promise, you said yourself the other day, unless they were sure of performing. Ought they, mamma?"

"But perhaps your papa did not exactly promise, dear."

This was a dangerous manœuvre—a complete change of front in the presence of the enemy.

"Well, then, perhaps he'll come now, as he didn't promise."

The little girl laughed at her brother's epigrammatic smartness. His mother coloured a little, but ignored the sarcasm.

"Don't be pert, Watty," said the younger lady; "I don't like pert children.—Mabel dear, I wonder you would not discourage your son's premature displays of wit."

Mabel shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing.

"I saw you smile, for all that, cousin Grace," pursued the irrepressible Watty. "O, yes, I did; I saw a twinkle in your eye."

His cousin cut short the controversy by chasing him round the little lawn and endeavouring to capture him with her pocket-handkerchief, lasso-fashion, he screaming the while with delight and laughter. At last she caught him, and at his earnest request lifted him on her shoulder and held him there with one arm, as a girl in a classic picture holds a pitcher or an urn. Her sleeve fell down from her white, strong, shapely arm, as she did so. She and the saucy rosy boy on her shoulder made a pretty group.

When Watty was set on his feet again, he renewed his plainings for papa.

"Do you see him coming yet, mamma?"

"No, dear, I don't."

"O, I wish he would come! I want my horse mended. I'll not go to bed, mamma, until it's mended. Nobody knows how to mend it but papa."

"Perhaps cousin Gracie could mend it for you if you were to ask her very nicely."

"O, no, she couldn't. Women don't understand anything."

"Who told you that?" asked cousin Grace, looking fixedly at him.

"Papa said it," the urchin replied very promptly, and with a saucy twinkle in his brown eyes.

"O! Papa said women don't understand anything?"

"Yes, he did."

This was given in a tone of triumph, as if the authority quoted must settle the question.

Grace tossed her head slightly, and said in a quiet undertone, "Some women do understand some things, however—and some people too." Then, as if repenting of any inuendo which might seem to be conveyed by the words—which, however, Mabel had not heeded, or perhaps even heard—the young woman laid her hand upon her aunt's massive shoulder affectionately, and said, "You are tired, Mabel; go in and lie upon the sofa, and I'll see the children safely stowed away in bed; and then we'll walk to the station and meet Walter."

It need perhaps hardly be said that the Walter for whom these ladies looked was the Walter Raleigh Warton of whom something was told in the previous chapters.

Mrs. Warton accepted the offer, being one of a peculiar class of women whose various duties are always discharged by somebody else, and who are invariably put quietly on one side by those who love them as well as by those who do not. Especially she was grateful to any one who managed her children for her; because, though they were fond of her, she was not of the least importance to them. She could do nothing for them; she had never done anything for them except to bring them into the world; and even that was accomplished so passively and languidly that her own life was nigh to fading out altogether during the performance. So long as they were washed and dressed and amused by somebody, she was content. Even her religious devotion, which was her deepest feeling save one, did not get much beyond the careful inculcation of the words

of the Lord's prayer, and a persistent ordinance that, whether the little ones, as they parroted its sublime words, were broad awake and giggling, or half asleep and nodding,—whether it were recited to herself or to her niece, or to the nurserymaid or the nurserymaid's sister (who occasionally dropped in to tea, and in the absence of Miss Ethelstone was pressed into the service),—it must always be said on bended knees and with folded hands formally uplifted. It would be cruel indeed to accuse a woman like Mrs. Warton of want of faith in the omnipotence of God ; yet it is doubtful whether she believed that He could hear the prayer of a worshipper, even an infant worshipper, who addressed Him in any save a kneeling posture.

The children said their prayers that night in the presence of their cousin ; and they never giggled or even yawned while she was there ; for they felt instinctively that her senses were awake, and that her attention was given to them. And be sure they prayed for papa, though he had not come in time to mend little Watty's horse.

Leaning somewhat heavily on her niece's arm, Mrs. Warton presently walked out on the way to the station. There was something of a brightness about the poor lady's eyes—and she had beautiful soft eyes, and a deep sweet voice—as she set out to meet her husband. The one passion of her life had been, and still was, for the husband of her youth. To her he was the greatest and the best man on earth. His speeches, when he used to take her to hear them—ah, he was too busy now, and she did not live in London—always seemed to her the sublimest inspirations of human genius. She did not trouble herself to understand them ; indeed, he had a sort of way of conveying to her that women are not supposed to understand such things, and she accepted the intimation meekly, and admired him all the more for the starlike dwelling apart of his serene and lofty intellect. But she admired them sincerely, and delighted to hear their fine rolling words thunder in her ears ; and her feelings followed every change of mood, and quickened or softened, or saddened or grew angry, at the call of his trumpet-tone—just as people wholly ignorant of the very rudiments of music, and unconscious of any effort to follow the meaning of an organ or an orchestra, are yet compelled to respond to the successive moods of its thrilling and crashing intonations. To his wife Walter Raleigh Warton was Demosthenes and St. John in one person.

The two women walked to the station along a beautiful ascending road, which the falling leaves of some beeches were just beginning to strew, and through some charming little groups of silver birches, looking, in their now almost leafless gracefulness, like clusters of Naiads or nymphs unrobed for a plunge in the waves. The autumnal stars were beginning to show their faintest lights in the sky ; and the deep red and green lamps of the railway-station, which was far up a high embankment, seemed like strange fantastic coruscations in the heavens.

Mrs. Warton was not a poetic woman, but some sense of the beauty of the scene and the calm deliciousness of the atmosphere impressed itself on her. "How lovely all this place looks to-night !" she remarked. "I wonder Walter does not like to be here oftener, or to stay here longer. But men are so absorbed in politics ; and he owes it to his country, he says, not to desert the career he has taken up."

Her companion frowned and bit her lip, but said nothing as yet.

"Patriots, you know, in old days were ready to sacrifice everything for their country," pursued Mabel.

"Even their wives and their children ?"

"Yes, dear, I suppose so."

"Well, I think there are some now who have not at all degenerated, and indeed who could make the sacrifice very cheerfully. By the way, Mabel, Artemus Ward offers to allow every drop of blood in the veins of all his able-bodied male relatives to be shed in the cause of the American Union."

"Does he, dear ? O, but come, now, that is only your nonsense. You are laughing at me ; I was talking seriously. You unmarried girls are never serious. Wait until you are married."

"Yes, I shall be made serious enough then, no doubt. But, Mabel, when did Walter write to say that he was coming to-night ? Yesterday ?"

"No, not yesterday. I think it was Monday, or perhaps Saturday."

This was Friday.

"A week ago nearly ?"

"Well, not quite a week ago, dear. But his time is so taken up, and he goes about from place to place a great deal."

"Yes, I saw his name in a paper as among the guests of Earl Somebody, somewhere in the country, a few days back."

"Did you really?" Mrs. Warton's face radiated with a mild triumph. "At an Earl's in the country? The naughty boy never wrote to tell me; but he is so modest: he never *will* boast of anything."

"I would not go to these places if I were such a man as Walter."

"Why not, dear?"

"What does he want there?"

"Men in political life always have to go to these places. Something about parties, you know; arranging who is to go in for this place and that—into Parliament. Walter hopes to have another chance made for him very soon. *We* don't quite understand these things, dear; but Walter does, you may be sure."

By this time they had reached the little station. They went in and sat down.

"How often I have come here alone of evenings," said Mrs. Warton, with something like a sigh, "before you came to bear me company!"

"And been disappointed?"

"Yes, sometimes; but not always, you know. Very often I came just in time to find my truant and to bring him away in triumph, all tired and dusty, and lead him home and make much of him, and be very happy."

"Well, my dear, dear Mabel, I hope you may be happy now—indeed I do. I hear the whistle of the train."

"Yes, here it is, and I know he's coming." Mrs. Warton sprang to her feet, light for the moment as a girl.

The train came in, and many people got out of it, some or most of them regular denizens of the place, who knew Mrs. Warton and greeted her; but her husband was not among them.

"Come away, dear," she said wearily to her niece. "I am so disappointed. O, if anything has happened to him!"

"Nothing has happened to him, you may be sure," her niece replied, in a tone which implied anger towards the absent rather than consolation or encouragement to the present.

"Ah, you have no husband," was Mrs. Warton's commentary, "and you don't know what it is to be always anxiously expecting some one home who can't come when you expect him. How

can I tell that there may not have been an accident somewhere, and perhaps he is killed?"

They did not talk much on the way home. When they reached the little porch of the house, Mrs. Warton said, "How glad I am the children are in bed! They really would worry me terribly just now."

The two women set themselves to occupation of some kind for the rest of an evening that promised to be very dreary. They kept a very modest household, two female servants being the entire domestic staff; and they saw few visitors. Miss Ethelstone had not been very long—only some year or so—living in the house. She had come to keep her aunt company, being herself an orphan, when her aunt's husband grew too busy in politics to come home very often. And she came to help to put things to rights, which were going dreadfully astray under Mrs. Warton's superintendence. And finally she came—this being however an unwhispered, hardly understood reason—to share quietly and delicately her very slender purse with her aunt's family. She had a tiny annuity left to her by her father, and it had been for a long time her great ambition to go to Rome, and live there and study art like the American girl in Hawthorne's story. But she cheerfully put off the project for a while, until the long-expected time should come when Warton's genius obtained its reward, and he became a prime minister, or a chief justice, or a governor-general of India,—which he was quite certain to do; but he must get into the House of Commons first, and he had not got there yet. So Grace came and helped his wife to manage her affairs; and the first step she took was to dispense with the services of the daily governess, and teach the children herself.

The two women then sat down to a night's occupation. Grace got the terrestrial globe and a volume of geography, and began to revolve the one and con over the other.

"I want so much to study all this latitude and longitude business," she said, looking up with a smile at her aunt. "I must keep at least one lesson ahead of little Mabel, or there will be a hopeless break-down. I never was strong in geography; and only yesterday she asked me some dreadful question about the latitude of something, and what it all meant; and only that that providential smash of a pane of glass took place through the aid of Watty and his ball, I do believe I should have been compelled, for the sake of my repu-

tation as a teacher, to say, 'Little girls must not ask questions ;' or, 'Hush, my dear ; you'll know all about that when you grow to be a woman.'

The last few words of this speech fell upon inattentive ears. For a quick step was heard just then at the door, followed by a peculiar whistle ; and Mrs. Warton jumped up and exclaimed, "Why, here *is* Walter, I do declare !" and ran to open the door herself, and give him a welcome.

Her niece remained discreetly where she was, being indeed in nowise personally anxious to greet the delinquent. In a moment or two Mrs. Warton entered, leading her husband in triumph.

Walter Raleigh Warton was a slight, shapely man, rather tall, with a profusion of thick dark curling hair, a colourless face, and a very youthful appearance. He did not look more than six- or seven-and-twenty years of age ; he must have been fully ten years older. He might fairly have been called a handsome man. He had beautifully white teeth, and hands as small and delicate and well-shaped as those of a woman ; and as he wore two or three sparkling rings, one might have taken his hand, when he laid it on the shoulder of his wife, for that of a woman. He wore neither beard, whiskers, nor moustache. If he were a fair symbol of the rights of labour, then labour is in its perfected illustration a wonderfully neat, clean, and dainty-looking affair. Close under Warton's eyes, though, if an observer looked keenly at them, could be discerned some outlines which are only graven by age, or care, or passion. And the eyes themselves, naturally bright, and often made still brighter by a purposed earnestness of expression on the proper occasions, had a way of losing their lustre sometimes with an odd suddenness when their owner was not actually speaking. The light faded out of them as if the dweller within had extinguished his lamps to brood awhile in the darkness. And then those who had best reason to study Warton's ways knew that he was not listening to a word which was spoken to him. But only his wife and her niece had much opportunity of studying him in this mood and expression. Abroad, he was generally all energy and vivacity. Mrs. Warton set down these sudden fits of abstraction to the account of genius and patriotism and a political career. ⁴ Her niece once offended both Warton and her by suddenly breaking off in some amusing scrap of personal experience she was detailing to him with the

words, "Now, Walter, I know you have not been listening to a word this some time. You quite forgot to keep up the smile! You remind me of a lady in *Sam Slick*, of whom it is said that the moment people's eyes were turned away, the smile dropped off her face like a petticoat when the string's broke. But I had my eyes on you, and I found you out. And now you must listen to the whole story over again as a punishment."

Which he did; this time listening attentively, but not much pleased at even this slight discovery.

Now Walter is being led in by his delighted wife. He kissed his niece, of whom indeed he was very fond; and, moreover, he always liked being waited on by women.

"Well, Grace, my wee lassie, how charming you look. Such roses on your cheeks! Not to be gathered in Belgravia, these blooming flowers. And Mabel too; she looks well, and apparently has not been pining too much for her husband. Ah, well; Providence will give us rest some time! But there is work to be done yet."

He sighed a very touching sigh—suppressed it still more touchingly—then reposed himself in his armchair, and asked with genial gaiety for some tea.

"But have you dined, Walter? Are you sure?"

"Yes; O yes. I dined two hours ago."

"And where do you come from, dearest? We quite gave you up. There is no train from London now?"

"No, dear; I did not come from London—in fact, I came from Coombe Castle."

"Coombe Castle! So you were there! Grace saw your name in the papers. But, my dear Walter, you surely have not been there all this time?"

"All what time, Mabel?"

"All that time since Grace saw the paper—days and days ago."

"Well, dear, I was there since Sunday, I think. But I was very much engaged—not pleasure, only politics."

"So near—within ten miles of me for days—and did not come!"

"I could not come, Mabel, before. I have come now."

"And where are your things—your luggage?"

"Well, the fact is, I have brought nothing with me. It was not worth while. I must go off again in the morning."

"Oh, my dear Walter! Again in the morning, after one short night?"

"Yes, love. I cannot help it. I must go. I am deeply engaged just at present."

"Are you going to London, then?"

Warton, be it said, always had chambers in London.

"Yes, to London; that is presently. But first I have of course to return to the castle. Now, dear, about that promised tea? I do assure you I feel weary."

So Walter had some tea, and was well waited on by two women, one of whom honestly adored him, while the other at least did her best to follow the example. He was very gracious, and took his wife's kisses with a sweet patience and benignity, and sometimes ran his hand playfully over his niece's hair with a manner half paternal, half gallant. Mabel rattled on with all the news of the little community for the past few days, and asked him countless questions about the castle, about the earl, about the countess, and what she was like, and how she dressed, and about the ladies staying at the castle. Suddenly, and raising his white hand with gentle earnestness to stay the further rush of the torrent of woman's curiosity, Walter said:

"Come, now, I have something to tell you in which you will take an interest. I was very near forgetting it. Do you know who is in town, and was asking about you? Particularly, most particularly anxious about you."

"Indeed I don't know at all. Who can there be in town who cares about me?"

"Come, then, guess. Three guesses."

"But, Walter love, I never could guess. And then I know it can be nobody—nobody of any consequence, I mean, in whom we take any interest."

"Yes, but it is though; somebody in whom you take an interest—or at least who still takes a deep interest in you. Think of the sail that brings our friends up from the under world. He has come over the ocean—up from the under world."

"Oh, is it possible? You don't mean poor Ralph Lennon?"

"Indeed I do."

"And so he has come back again. Poor dear Ralph! How glad I shall be to see him!"

Mrs. Warton was still a young woman. Women older than

she are capable, in real life, if not in romance, of breaking strong hearts with passion ; and, stranger still, of feeling their own hearts rent anew, or rent for the first time, with true and unconquerable love. She knew quite well that Ralph Lennon's heart once was torn with love for her, and that, refused by her, he flung himself away, first on what is called life here, and next upon the death-in-life of a far raw colony. Her heart ought to have beat very quickly at the mention of his name ; her cheek ought to have flushed a burning red ; at least she ought to have looked embarrassed in some way. But this good woman was as composed as her niece, who never set eyes on Lennon in her life and had not half a dozen times heard his name. Mabel was delighted to hear that her old lover was in England ; but she had no sentimental emotion whatever connected with his name. She had no secret about him at all, and would have told anybody who cared to hear it that Ralph Lennon once was in love with her, and wanted to marry her, but that she could not have him, as calmly and sweetly as she might have told of her intimacy with some schoolgirl friend. How he had loved, and been disappointed, she would have explained with just the same unembarrassed regret as if she were telling how he once had a fever, and had to have his hair cut off.

"Poor Ralph ! I hope he will come to see me." There was something magnanimously simple about her pity for poor Ralph. "What does he look like, Walter love ?"

"Strong and brown. Very much aged, I thought—quite a middle-aged sort of man. Yet he is young—I think younger by a year or two at least than I am."

"He used to be a very handsome young man. Is he handsome now, Walter ?"

"Yes, I think so—I don't know, in fact. But I believe he has made a good deal of money. He is very fortunate." And Warton sighed—a deep, sincere, involuntary sigh.

"Not fortunate in everything, love ? Not in everything. He used to think *you* fortunate, used he not ?"

This was said in a fondling tone, and with a hand laid tenderly on Walter's shoulder, while his wife's soft, loving eyes looked appealingly into his. She had beautiful eyes. Monotony of life, inactivity of mind and body, and the power of the flesh,—the literal flesh,—had not conquered these. "Only thine eyes remained—they would not go."

But Warton's own eyes saw nothing that was before him just now. "Yes," he said; "of course, yes—not fortunate in that way. But how strange that he should have made a heap of money in a few years—digging or farming or something out there; and what a career it will give him here now, if he has the brains and the spirit to follow it! What would some of us give for the chance! We rack our brains, and wear out our frames, and make ourselves slaves, and run into all manner of risks, and brave disgrace—good God!—and think we have talents and genius and what not; and we remain poor, and find our poverty a millstone round our necks: and a fellow who was always a romantic, headlong sort of fool runs out to Botany Bay or somewhere for a few years, and comes back rich! And now"—Warton's voice dropped, and he spoke in a quiet, half-meditative tone—"now he has lands and beeves—lands and beeves."

"Are not those Falstaff's words?" Grace calmly inquired, as she looked up from her globe.

"They are; and they are bitter words, too."

"Yes, I suppose so. He had squandered his life away in folly, and idleness, and self-conceit, I think—for I always imagine Falstaff delighting to be the great man of tapsters and low companions; and then he envied somebody who once was a poor young fellow, perhaps, but who now has lands and beeves. I thought I knew the words; but I don't know whether I really understand the meaning of them. Do you think I do, Walter?"

He put his hand under his chin, and looked fixedly at her. His piercing dark eyes were met calmly by hers.

"Yes, I think you understand them," he said; and he remained silent for a moment or two.

"But, Walter," began Mrs. Warton again, "I always thought Ralph Lennon had talents."

"Yes, dear, so he had—great talents, I thought at one time. But I used to think he wanted wisdom, perhaps, and was more likely to spoil a career than make it. Now he has England's political life before him. The way is clear—he has money—he may do anything and be anything; while—" He shrugged his shoulders, and dropped into a haggard silence.

Presently he looked round, and saw that his wife's eyelids were drooping. "You are sleepy, Mabel dear," he said, "and must not remain up for me. I *did* want a few pages written

for me—at my dictation—but I will not keep you up. I dare say I can manage them myself, though my writing is so dreadful, people say they can't read it."

"Shall I write for you, Walter?" asked Grace.

"Thank you—if you would—if it would not much trouble you?"

"O, no; I will do it with pleasure."

"That's a dear girl; and then poor Mabel can go to bed."

"Thank you both," said Mabel; "for indeed I am so tired that I don't believe I could do anything." With all her love for Walter, Mabel was always glad when anybody would relieve her of any task which should naturally be hers. So she went to bed and fell asleep, and dreamed—very innocently—that poor Ralph Lennon had come to see her, and was very fond of her now, and of Walter too, and that they all lived in the same street, and were very happy.

Walter meanwhile was walking up and down the room with his hand under his chin, or occasionally lying in his easy chair, and dictating some letters to his niece. They did not speak much of anything but the letters while the work was going on. He, as he leaned in his chair, sometimes gazed covertly, fixedly on her, and studied the clear firm lines of her mouth, and noted too the developing beauty of her womanhood. When the closing sentence of the last letter had been finished, he said:

"Now, Grace, you are tired, I know, and I must not exact any more. I don't think I want anything else done; and you are a good girl to work so late for me. You must go to bed—I shall remain up a little longer."

"Are you going early in the morning, Walter?"

"Yes; very early."

"Then do you mean to see the children?"

The children! He had never asked for them. Stranger still, their mother had never spoken of them.

"O yes; of course—the dear little ones. I must see them—tomorrow morning, before I go. They are always up very early, are they not?"

"Yes, that they are; as I know when they come battering at my door somewhere about sunrise, I think, and clamouring for me to come and play with them."

"You women, how happy you are? If you only knew it! You can stay at home and cultivate the domestic virtues, and

be happy children always while you have children round you ; but *we*—”

He would have gone on with some pathetic lament over the life of man, but the girl cut him short.

“Don’t, please, talk in that way. It is thrown away on *me*. It is nonsense.”

“Nonsense, dear child ?”

“Yes, Walter ; nonsense. You don’t believe a word of it. You despise in your heart our trifling, monotonous lives ; and you despise us for leading them. Now don’t stop me. You know I speak the truth. What hinders *you* from living a domestic life, and cultivating the domestic virtues, and all that sort of thing ?”

“Ah, you dear, impetuous, illogical women, who cannot understand that a man’s duty is sometimes to sacrifice—”

“Please, Walter, don’t talk to me as if I were a child, or a working man, or—or anybody but what I am.” She was actually on the point of saying, “or your wife,” but checked herself in time. “I am sorry to see poor Mabel left always alone ; I see her pining and unhappy, and—and—in fact, I can’t stand it ;” and, as energetic girls will do when much in earnest nowadays, she broke into slang.

“My dear girl, what am I to do ? A political career is the most remorseless mistress, and if you neglect it for a moment you are thrown out altogether. I have a terrible up-hill battle to fight. I have to court friends and supporters and—”

“And patrons ?”

“Yes ; and patrons—it is only too true. I am a man without money. I have neglected my profession, and now it deserts me. I talk to you frankly, because I see you are not a child, but a woman of sense and spirit ; and I want you to understand me. I am an ambitious man—it is not a girl like *you* who would blame me for that. I know I have a career before me, if only I can work on yet a little while. And listen, Grace ; it is only by patrons, whether they be peers or mobs—I try both—that a man like me can get on in English political life. If I had Lennon’s money—ah, then indeed I could do without either. But I tell you, girl, I am compelled to go on. I cannot stop. I am plunged in difficulties. What would you do if you were like me ? Would you renounce your career ?”

“I would,” she answered vehemently. “I would renounce

any career which had to be followed by seeking the patronage of lords—or of mobs either. I would not surrender my home—and my soul—for such a career. Give it up, Walter, give it up! Your talents would soon make a way for you which would be free and independent, and which would never compel you to sacrifice your home.”

“My home!” he said in a low tone, and he again shrugged his shoulders. “I suppose a home means companionship of thought and mind, does it not? Dear Mabel is the best of women; but do you think you could live long, Grace, on sugar-plums? I can’t.”

He took up one of his letters and began to glance over it. Grace was not inclined to continue the conversation. Perhaps she wished she had not said so much. So she rose and bade him good-night. He drew her towards him and kissed her. There was nothing in that. She had sat upon his knee and pulled his hair when a bright little child, ten years ago, and he always since then kissed her on meeting and parting. But there was an emphasis in his kiss to-night, and there was a warmth in the pressure of his hand, which sent a somewhat disagreeable sensation through her, and made her glad to be alone.

“She grows a fine girl,” Warton thought when she had gone, “and she will have brains as well as heart. A man who has a wife like that might perhaps give up a career for her; or, better still, she would help him to make a career, and would understand him and keep him right. Everything is against *me*. I have nothing but myself. I am alone.”

He remained long up, thinking. When at last he went to bed, he took every care not to waken his wife. Her kisses would have distressed him.

CHAPTER V

WALTER WARTON'S HOPES.

WALTER RALEIGH WARTON was one of the might-have-beens. He might have been a man of genius. Indeed he seemed to have missed by a narrow chance the ray of inspiration as it descended. He was, however, a strikingly good imitation of a man of genius. He had the contortions of

the Sibyl. Nature gave him a glittering surface of talent, a passionate aspiration towards success of any kind, a deep self-confidence, and a thrilling, powerful voice. Therefore he started early in life as an orator and a politician ; and he naturally fell into a general career of opposition, that path requiring little study and little acquisition of facts. His talents would have suited just as well for journalism, for fiction, for law, as for politics—perhaps for the pulpit best of all. Anything he did would have made a certain impression, for a time, on what may be called the popular mind. It would have been showy, full of bright colours, sentiments which had a suggestion of novelty and a strong flavour of earnestness. Jean Paul Richter compares some one to a lighthouse—"high, far-shining, empty." The intellect of Walter Warton was of this description. He flung himself into politics for three reasons : first, one can make a success there, for a time, without labour, study, or preliminary training ; next, he had acuteness enough to see that in England political life is the one only sphere in which a man without money or rank can possibly obtain social influence ; finally, he had a wonderful fluency, a ready power of turning everything he wanted to say into the form of a noble sentiment or a thrilling antithesis, and, as has been already mentioned, a fine voice.

Warton's father was a dissenting minister, who had been a working man. Warton inherited much of the fervent power of denunciation which had made his father conspicuous among Birmingham trade orators in the days of the proposed march upon London, and of the Manchester blanketeers. The eloquence of denunciation was not so successful when the elder Warton put down his workman's tools and turned minister ; and he subsided into a very quiet, laborious, earnest, and obscure preacher of what he understood to be the Gospel. He lived near the northern border of Lancashire, and Walter Warton was born and reared in Cumberland. His father saw that the lad inherited his own declamatory power, and thought the bar would be its best field of exercise. Walter insisted on going to Oxford ; and as his mother was a woman of some means who had fallen in love with the elder Warton's preaching and married him, and considerably died too soon to interfere with her son's schemes of personal ambition, the money was found for him. He went to Oxford, and quietly lapsed into the social respectability of orthodox opinions. Then he studied for the bar, and was called ; but before he had made much of his

way there, his father died and left him free, and with just enough of annual income to set a man astray—not half enough to secure him a career, or even a satisfactory living. Walter Warton thought the bar slow and toilsome, and deliberately made up his mind for politics, parliament, renown, and finally an appointment ; and looking coolly around him, he saw no other way so congenial and convenient of mounting into public life and a parliamentary seat as on the shoulders of the working man. The working man, his wrongs and his rights, were just then becoming fashionable and influential. Warton had naturally many sympathies with the working man—sympathies which had been bequeathed to him, along with his voice and his eloquence, by his honest old father. His instincts indeed were never decidedly ungenerous where his personal interests did not coerce them ; and he did feel, at the beginning of his public career, an honest ambition to be known as one who loved and served the British artisan.

But Warton had by nature and by culture unhappily very un-Spartan tastes. He loved luxury and the society of swells. He loved to dine at splendid tables, and to be waited on by liveried servants. He loved to have his clothes made by the first tailor, and to be seen walking arm-in-arm with the heir to a title. A woman's soft, sweet voice filled him with joy ; the sight of a woman's white shoulder and bosom, rising resplendent out of silk and lace, was dear to him as the sun and shadow on a mountain side to one of the Lake poets. He loved perfumes and jewels and carriages and sparkling wine. Instincts and interests therefore combined to suggest to him the necessity of giving rather a new complexion and purpose to the character of a working man's orator. The acknowledged parliamentary leaders of the Radicals—strong, simple, unselfish men ; men, too, who had plenty of money, but gave no delightful dinners—rather fought shy of him. They did not care much about his eloquence—one or two of them being orators of acknowledged genius and power, and valuing even their own oratory merely as an instrument in compelling the passing of certain desired laws ; and they did not seem to have much faith in men who had no money, and yet were not content to serve in the ranks. These leaders did not particularly want Warton in parliament ; did not care if he never got there, because they had little need of his eloquence ; and would have preferred some blunt ungainly manufacturer from the north, whose means placed him above

suspicion, and whose honest vote might always have been counted on. So when, after years of struggling and stumping and spouting, after acquiring a popularity and a name for eloquence which threw artisan crowds into raptures, Warton at last ventured to stand for a borough so Liberal that no Tory had a ghost of a chance there, he found himself defeated after an expensive contest by a respectable local nobody, who had plenty of money, professed steady old-fashioned Liberalism, and could hardly utter three consecutive sentences at the hustings.

From that hour Warton found himself drawing nearer and nearer to the Tories. He began to think they were the true friends to the working man. He began to think they appreciated talent better than the Liberals, and were less intolerant of poverty—as, indeed, is quite true. He found that there was more of the “good fellow” character among them; that their manners were more refined, their doors more hospitably open, and their women more attractive. He became at last inspired with the grand idea that the country was to be saved by a *rap-prochement* between the Derby-Disraelites and the working man. Some popular question or another—perhaps it was the Crimean war—where party politics did not directly intervene, enabled him decently to break with his old friends, and even to declaim against them as, in that instance, enemies of England. He did the Tories good service, and they were really grateful; and he whispered to their understrappers that he could do better service still—that he could bring the working man right over at some great crisis; and they whispered the promise to some of their chiefs, who were not too confident, but thought there might be something in it, and passed round the *mot d'ordre* that some attention was to be paid to Warton. Attention was paid to him accordingly,—especially when it was found that his manners were gentlemanly, his hands white, his clothes made by Poole, and his appearance in the drawing-room unexceptionable.

Was it mentioned that Walter Warton had no claim whatever to the interjected name of “Raleigh”? It was never given him by his godfathers or godmothers. He took it “for the sake of euphony,” as Mr. Kinglake would say. His real names were John Walter Warton; but he did not like the combination, so he dropped the “John,” and called himself Walter Warton. Then he thought a third name necessary; and he liked one which had a suggestion of greatness in it. So

he called himself Walter Raleigh Warton, and was nearly as proud of the Raleigh as if it were a patent of nobility. It made people sometimes assume that he must be a collateral descendant of the great Elizabethan hero ; and indeed, at last Warton began to fancy there was something in the idea. At all events, it seemed to give him a new title to a career of distinction. It is hard not to feel heroic when one brandishes a sword, or great when one subscribes himself the bearer of an illustrious name. Walter Warton dearly loved to see his name in print, as one of the speakers at a public meeting, or one of the guests at a fashionable dinner ; but on the whole he would probably have preferred to find it left out altogether than to read it set down as " Mr. Warton," or " Mr. Walter Warton," or—worst of all—" Mr. W. Warton."

Mr. Hotten's *History of Signboards* has lately called the attention of all of us to an object which doubtless very few who walk up and down Oxford Street would otherwise have noticed—Hogarth's sign-painting of the Man loaded with Mischief. It is hardly necessary now to say that the principal object in the painting is a man whose bending shoulders bear, among other encumbrances, the weight of a very substantial wife. Surely that poor man might be pitied if he had to toil up Holborn Hill thus loaded ; more still if he had to mount the steps of the Monument ; more yet, if he had to climb to the top of a tree. Walter Warton soon began to find it difficult to climb to the top of the social tree carrying his plump wife on his shoulder. So he calmly and prudently put her down and prepared to mount alone, assuring her that when he had made his way, and established a secure place high up among the branches, he would help her to mount up beside him. She believed it, for she had a vast capacity of faith. Sincere, superficial, and sinless herself, she had no thought of insincerity or depth or sin in others. Walter Warton was intellectually and morally a very young man when he fell in love with her. Her sweet soft voice, her beautiful eyes, her white arms, fascinated him. He was urged on to a greater passion by observing Ralph Lennon's love for her, and by man's natural antagonism. He threw himself into the contest, and he won. Perhaps the first decidedly mean act Walter Warton the man committed was when he directed the attention of Mabel Ethelstone and her people to Ralph Lennon's youthful extravagances. And even this act Warton persuaded himself was a conscientious

duty. Could he see an innocent and religious girl sacrificed to a scapegrace and an infidel? In virtue's cause a true man knows no friendship.

Warton's virtue was rewarded. Mabel fell deeply and faithfully in love with him, and they were married; and after a twelvemonth or so of tepid happiness Walter found that he was bound for life to an innocent, overgrown child—an animated wax doll, with a tender heart and no brains. He began to go about in a sort of society, and he met handsome, graceful, clever women, who could talk with piquancy and force; who read the books of the day, and knew something about newspapers and politics; and had husbands and brothers and fathers in the House; and could lead a man charmingly, artlessly up to the edge of a tender, fascinating flirtation, and keep him poised there in a bewildering ineffable state of anxiety and ecstasy. After such society, poor Mabel was like new milk after champagne. Let us do Warton justice. For a time he honestly tried hard to love his wife still. At last he saw it would not do, and he dropped the idea. Relieved of the mental struggle, he found he could put on the appearance of love much more easily; and once he had satisfied his wife that she must live out of London, that he could not possibly spend every night with her, and that she had better have her niece's companionship, his mind was at rest. He had set down his load, and could climb the tree alone. Often in society he saw women who were in one sense crowns to their husbands; who understood politics, shared man's ambition; could make friends and keep them, and dexterously drop them if necessary; who could advise and stimulate and guide; who could plan and scheme and conquer: and sometimes Warton felt that Providence had been unkind to him. When Ralph Lennon came back to England with money and without a wife—having apparently all political roads thus thrown open to him—Warton felt for a moment inclined to become an infidel. He suppressed, however, the dreadful promptings of Satanic doubt, which it would be simply impossible to tolerate in connection with a Tory career; and he began to think whether, after all, some good purpose might not be served if he could regain a little of his influence over his old acquaintance. A quick thought glanced through him: "How Mabel might help me now, if she had only sense!" And he remembered with a sigh how fat Mabel was growing, how little vivacity she had,

how quiet, innocent, and uninteresting she was. "Even *he*," thought Warton—and he knew well the difference of sentiment between one who has and one who has not—"even *he* could not think her very interesting now." He was glad to get away from his wife's house—it was not home to him in any human sense—and to breathe again the genial atmosphere of Coombe Castle, where he met men who had influence and money, women who had beauty and brains.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD HOME.

IN "canny auld Cummerlan'," not far off the border where a straggling out-of-the-way end of Lancashire interjects itself,—a little inland, yet when a west wind blows hardly beyond the sweep of the salt breath of the sea,—lies the queer rambling town or village of Waterdale, with the tiny lake behind it, where the Alwyns lived, and where Ralph Lennon now looked upon his early home. The town lies on the seaward side, and has straggling through it the little river which, beginning a thread-like "burn" away among the mountains, fills the basin of the lake, after plunging wildly through many a gully and rock-riven pass, and then speeds away broadening to the sea. On the inland side of the lake are but few houses—some dozen or so, scattered here and there, mostly those of poor labourers or very small farmers. But there is a deep pass on that side—a pass through which you make your way into the mountain-land, and pursuing which up hill and down dale far enough, you at last come upon the more famous lakes which are sung of the poets. One remarkable house stands at the mouth of this pass, some mile or so in from the lake. It is a large, heavy, old-fashioned stone mansion, with a little ground about it—ground once neatly laid out, now falling into drear decay. Damp and gloom appear to make their own of this building; green mould is on the high steps, and the windows rattle at every gust. Lately, indeed, some one had begun painting and repairing and decorating the house, but stopped in the midst of the

work and left the rest undone. The needful operations were checked by imperative command of Ralph Lennon ; for this was his house, and he would, if he could, have had it utterly unaltered. He came too late to accomplish this wish ; but he stopped the further progress of improvement, and he declined positively to refurnish the house. Some of the rooms were absolutely unfurnished ; he insisted that they should remain so. Perhaps he might not stay there long ; perhaps he would have the sad old house pulled down altogether, and so rid his life of its drear associations. But at present it was his humour to steep himself in those very associations ; “drinking them like wine,” filling himself with the luxury of pain, feeding on remorse which came too late. As Johnson did penance bare-headed in the market-place of Uttoxeter, Ralph Lennon humbled and saddened himself, and made vain atonement in the lonely, melancholy rooms where every object he saw revived the memory of his father, and the desolate recollections of a wasted youth.

An old man and his wife had been left in charge of the house. They were rough, outspoken Cumberland people. Lennon retained them still, to keep house in his absence, and to act as his servants while he remained at home. He wanted no other attendance ; and, indeed, had been long accustomed to do most things for himself. He made arrangements to have such few books as he required brought from Liverpool—some books there were which accompanied him everywhere, and without which he could hardly imagine existence going on ; and he meant to bring back whatever personal effects he had in this country when returning from London after his next visit. So his entering into his father’s house was quite a disappointment to the neighbours, who expected grand doings, and looked out to see “the dull old place gilt with the gold of a millionaire.” It had gone abroad that Lennon had gathered piles of gold in Australia, where some of the Cumberland folks pictured it heaped up like the boulders in the Kirkstone Pass ; and every trunk or box conveyed into the old house was at once assumed to be filled with massy ingots of treasure. When it was rumoured that Lennon had actually dismissed the workmen who were “reviving” the house, that he was having no new furniture, that he meant to live there alone and without one gleam of surrounding splendour, people refused to believe it ; then, when conviction was forced upon

them, they could only explain it by the assumption that the returned Australian was a miser, or a madman, or both.

Of all this, however, Lennon heard little and cared less. He had only two or three days to remain in the place before returning to London to see Warton ; and these days he spent for the most part in wandering about the hills and the shore of the lake, and his own desolate garden and more desolate rooms. He did not go into the town of Waterdale. Many people there knew him, and would have had questions to ask of him, and old associations to revive ; and he shrank from all this at present. He would inure himself gradually to it, he thought, and so it would come less embarrassing and disagreeable. He called upon nobody—there were not indeed more than half a dozen families near who were in the way of making or receiving formal calls, and he knew that the Alwyns had not returned.

The Alwyns had a handsome house, built in modern style, like the houses which are growing up around Windermere, with a smooth-shaven lawn, and a conservatory, and a fountain, and glowing flower-beds. It stood upon the opposite side of the lake to that where Lennon lived, and was indeed a contrast in every way to his heavy and sombre old dwelling. Lennon passed it once—perhaps he walked to it with real though unacknowledged purpose ; and he remembered that in his time only a farmhouse stood there. Dr. Alwyn had built the new and elegant villa for his young wife, and her tastes and fancies had adorned it everywhere. Lennon was in a grim humour, and inwardly growled at the elegance, and began to make up his mind that the acquaintance originated in Switzerland would hardly warm into friendship in Cumberland. Dr. Alwyn of course would rank with the gentry—they were not many—of the Waterdale neighbourhood ; and Lennon remembered how often, when a boy growing into manhood, he had been galled by observing that his father's money was quite impotent to obtain for him any friendly notice from those who claimed to be country gentlemen. Perhaps he might have acknowledged that some at least of the republican and democratic lawlessness of his college days was due to a keen, possibly a wrongheaded, conviction that he had suffered personal slight at the hands of local aristocrats.

Little as he cared in general for gossip, he had to talk now and then with his two servants, and old Mrs. Beck would

persist in telling him anecdotes about the neighbours. He asked a chance question of the Alwyns.

"O, Doctor's a gud man, and cliver man. Folk say here he kens all things. His hand's a'ways open t' the poor. All folks here likes him and luv'es him."

"And Mrs. Alwyn?"

"Well, Mrs. Alwyn's cliver woman, and gud: but she thinks nae little o' hersel', and hauds her head high. Nut but she's a kind woman too, and a top marketer I hear; but she fashes ower much fur my taste, and flytes people that might be her grandmothers aboot the way they keeps theer houses and minds theer children, and all that. Many of them will tak' affront; but it's nobut a way she hes o' showin' her likin'. Young as she be she cen manage her husband."

"Weears the breeks, sir," interjected Mr. Beck. "Meast of our wives wad do't if they cud."

Ralph dropped the conversation—and perhaps, short as it was, had hardly kept up with it. For he had made up his mind that the Alwyns, especially the lady, "went in" for local aristocracy; and he thought he had good reason to feel convinced—a conviction now not without special bitterness—that persons who claimed to be of the gentry of Cumberland were not likely to be very genial even to the sons of people who had made money in trade. He kept to his own side of the lake for the next day or two, and wished he had chosen some other day for the crossing of the Tête Noire than that which the Alwyns selected for the same journey.

It was lonely work, wandering about those roads and paths and rooms, but it was congenial to Lennon just now, and in a kind of way he enjoyed it. He chewed the cud of sweet and bitter association everywhere. Of course the place did not look the same to his eyes, and in some spots he had to conjure up the old memories, and with their aid rehabilitate the scene. No sensations have been more often analysed and described than those which fill us when we revisit, after long years, some place familiar to our boyhood. In Ralph Lennon's eyes the common change marked itself. Everything looked contracted, poor, and mean compared with the picture which memory painted. The mountains were low, the lake was a pool, the ravines were tame; there was a faded appearance about everything—like that of a long-disused garment which we take up and cannot help recognising, though it seems so worn and

shrunk and shabby. But the memories of the father who was so kind and indulgent and tender, of the woman he loved in vain, of the early years which were so bright and full of promise—these saddened and sweetened and sanctified the place. He stood by his father's grave; the whole scene seemed the grave of his own youth.

Yet it must not be supposed that even for the few days of his first home-visit Ralph Lennon did nothing but moon over graves, real and metaphorical. He had set his heart upon doing something good for the neighbourhood of his early life; and perhaps at present all the ambitions that once burned fiercely within him had smouldered down to a mere desire to print his memory on that obscure mountain village. He resolved to build a school here, an asylum of some kind there; he ranged through the few scattered cottages on his side of the lake, and thought he would buy up the land there, and plant a little model settlement of comfortable picturesque homesteads. He had great ideas of carrying the peasant-proprietary system, almost indigenous to some parts of Cumberland and Westmoreland, to immense completeness on the ground near him; he laid out, mentally, in two or three days, money enough to have beggared him were he another Monte Christo. There was doubtless a good deal of the old spirit of defiance about his benevolence, and perhaps he would have cherished his beneficent plans none the less if they directly tended to break the patriarchal tie between lords of the soil and diggers of it. Setting class against class, the crime unpardonable in the respectable eyes of our generation, was, for that very reason doubtless, rather a fascinating sin to the present mood of Ralph Lennon. Perhaps it is not impossible that the short meeting with Walter Warton, and the allusion to Coombe Castle, had quickened and aggravated that mood.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD FRIEND.

ON the appointed day Lennon was again in London, and dining with Warton at his club. Warton had not made his way into the stately Carlton; nor, even if its doors had

been opened to him, would he have ventured as yet on so decided a proclamation of his change of colours. Of course he had not attempted in his wildly democratic days to seek out Brooks's; and he was only thinking of the chances of the Reform, then even more restricted in its hospitality than now, when the gradual change began to show itself in his opinions which would have made it useless for him to get his name put up there. He belonged, however, to a small, social, not inexpensive club, founded by literary and politico-literary men, none of them actual leaders in their way—a sort of *demi-monde* of literature and politics. Here you could have a dinner quite as good as anywhere else; and you were safe from being sat upon by bishops, or dons, or heavy dignitaries, or solemn bores of any kind. A few members of parliament, of the younger school and of both parties, belonged to it; a few rising lawyers, many journalists, many literary men, some guardsmen. And here Walter Raleigh Warton entertained his friend Ralph Lennor at dinner—and a good dinner too.

Three other men were present: Captain Eastham, M.P., was one—a stalwart and gallant young county member of the Tory side, who late one night suddenly amazed his party, his opponents, his father, and himself, by jumping on his feet just before the division, interposing between the splendid resonance of the Whig minister's peroration and a house longing to divide, and delivering a speech so racy, humorous, telling, unprepared, full of good sense, good hits, and roistering animal spirits, that he actually got a hearing, and then thundering applause from rows of exulting Tories, and shouts of laughter from the less serious part of the Liberals,—your true Liberal takes everything generally *au grand sérieux*,—and finally the unexpected honour of a reply from another minister, who had to be put up unprepared at three in the morning to answer the new orator. The division, of course, was not much affected by the *impromptu* performance; but Eastham's speech became for the time almost as famous as Charles Townshend's champagne oration. Handshakings and congratulations from all sides rewarded the unrehearsed display; and the only ill-natured thing said on the occasion was murmured by a great Conservative leader, who whispered, "*Mon âne parle, et même il parle bien.*" Eastham took his success very modestly, and did not even try to encore it. He frankly confessed that he never could tell why he got up to speak at all, or how he came to speak so well; and he

declared that when he found himself on his legs, gazing fixedly at unimpassioned and chilling Mr. Speaker, and heard the sound of his own voice, it was a toss-up whether he was to sink collapsed and bewildered back into his seat, or plunge madly on. "I could never have got through a sentence if the House had been quiet and attentive," he used to say; "but when I heard your Liberal fellows shouting at me, and saw so many of our own men looking up as if to ask, 'What the devil does he want, making a fool of himself at such a time?' by Jove, sir, it maddened me, and I let myself go at it—over, anyway." "I've often told you," Captain Eastham would say to any of his Liberal friends—and he had plenty of friends among all parties—"the one great thing you Radical fellows want is animal spirits. You haven't got animal spirits, and therefore you don't use your voices or stand to your friends. You have more sense, I daresay, than we have, and you understand a deal more about figures; and anybody with brains must know that we haven't a speaker fit to hold a candle to Bright; but you want the pluck, the animal spirits. There we have you. If *we* had Bright, what a phalanx of young fellows he would have about him! How we would cheer for him and shout down his opponents! Your people don't understand that sort of thing."

Captain Eastham's notions of party deficiencies were not bad. He had such genial ways and so good a nature that everybody liked him; and now that he had shown himself capable of something, there was a great idea among the Tory captains of promoting him to the rank of "Whip" whenever there came a vacancy in that bustling office.

The second of Warton's guests was Philip Hamerfield, a rising writer of the politico-philosophic school. He wrote for progressive reviews and high-class weekly journals. He was a Unitarian, and had what Tom Berry of Southwark called Views of Life. His views and opinions suited Warton very well just now, for although Hamerfield despised all Conservatism as unphilosophic and stupid, yet such was the peculiar nature of his mental progress that it somehow brought him in particulars quite back to the Conservative standpoint. His philosophical world was clearly globular, like the orb we live in; and starting, therefore, from the Conservative Greenwich, you were certain, if you only went far enough, to arrive at just the same spot in the end. Or one might adopt another form of illustration. Poor Albert Smith somewhere speaks of

people who were so determined to be fashionable that they kept going farther and farther into the West-end, until at last they went too far, and tumbled right over into Chelsea. So Philip Hamerfield and others of his school kept pushing so far and so independently into the West-end of high political culture, that they were actually falling over into the Chelsea of narrow and uncultivated Toryism.

The third guest was the latest novelty in travel. He had gone wonderful depths into Asia and Africa, and lately had performed some special feat of discovery or other achievement in the Australian continent. He had brought back from his travels a majestic dogmatism upon all ethnological subjects, and all political and social questions which had or could be supposed to have any possible connection therewith. He settled everything by a reference to the profound and hopeless worthlessness and wickedness of all "native" races. To be sure, if you came to talk closely with him, you found that he had but a poor opinion of the human family anywhere. His anecdotes, which were many, and his philosophy, which was simple and decided, went to prove that man is the most debased of all living creatures, except woman. This, however, was his philosophy among his friends. In his public writings and lectures he confined himself to the inferiority, brutality, sensuality, unteachableness, and cruelty of the dark-skinned peoples — the "native" races in short. That was the theory in which he most firmly believed; for he was understood among his friends to reject, as beneath his notice, the popular doctrine about a future life.

The traveller, Mr. Garth, had been invited by Warton, partly because he was a lion, and ought to produce therefore a good first impression upon Lennon; partly too because, as Lennon came from the colony of Victoria, he ought to feel greatly interested in one who had explored the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria. But the good intentions of the host failed so far. In the first place Lennon had never before heard of the great traveller, and in the next place one of the great traveller's favourite subjects of invective was the incurable wickedness of the Maori race. Lennon had been a good deal in New Zealand, and the great traveller had never set foot there; but the latter settled the condition of the Maori, and the treatment proper to be applied to him, by reference to experience drawn from the banks of the Congo. Lennon being

too lazy to argue, and the traveller too grandly dogmatic to condescend to argument, the latter had it all his own way, and Lennon soon shut up as far as that topic was concerned. So there was little good gained for either or for the company by the juxtaposition of two men who had sailed the Southern seas. The conversation soon therefore lapsed into politics. Women and politics, said the shrewd old statesman, all men can talk about. Mr. Garth much preferred the former topic, and had some very choice anecdotes touching the ways of the sex in savage life. But the anecdotes hung fire. Nobody liked them. Warton had far too much of the true epicurean about him—Hamerfield had too much intellect—Lennon had too much soul—Captain Eastham was too manly—to relish the discussion of woman, even in her African state, as the naturalist might analyse his chimpanzee, or the agriculturist his hog. So politics set in ; a thing which Warton would perhaps have gladly avoided if he could.

“When do you start again, Warton?” asked Captain Eastham—“put up for another borough, I mean? There are some stirring times coming, and a fellow like you oughtn’t to be out of the House.”

“I don’t want to obtrude myself,” Warton modestly replied. “I think I have a sort of claim upon some constituency somewhere. If no one appears to admit the claim, or inclined to recognize it to any purpose, I must only stand aside. I hope the cause can go on without me ; that is, without my presence in parliament. I shall be found working for it to the last, in or out.”

“What cause?—whose cause?” asked Garth. “I don’t understand your political jargon, you know. Your own cause?—or that of some party you want to serve?—or that of some rabble or another? Put it into English, and let us know what it is ; for I don’t know, and I daresay Mr. Lennon does not understand the matter any better.”

“Not in the least,” said Lennon. “When I left England, we were all still wild about the French Revolution of 1848, and the Roman Republic, and the German Parliament, and the rights of man. I think universal suffrage and triennial parliaments, with a dash of communism, represented our cause then ; but I presume it is something a great deal more respectable now.”

“My cause,” Eastham broke in, “is a good, honest, intelligible sort of thing. It is legitimate Toryism.”

"And Warton's," growled Garth, "is illegitimate Toryism."

"I have devoted myself," said Warton gravely, "to the cause of the working man. I wish to make him a ruler, and not a slave; a benefactor, and not a beggar. You may laugh if you will—that is my cause."

"Keep the fellows down," replied Garth; "that is the only way. The working man is a savage; and the savage is a child."

"A child-Hercules then," Warton exclaimed. "In his cradle he can strangle serpents."

"Splendid!" said Garth. "Very fine, and convincing too. Quite settles the question, I think."

"To a certain extent," said Hamerfield, the moral philosopher, "I agree with Mr. Garth—"

"Deuce you do!" growled under his breath the genial traveller.

"The working man is as yet a child, so far as regards the development of his reasoning and intellectual faculties. The reasoning faculties, and not the instincts, must govern political life. I would develop these by education, and would proceed carefully and tentatively to intrust him gradually with that share of power which is his just and balanced proportion—"

"If he would only be good enough to wait," murmured Lennon, half yawning. "In some places he doesn't wait, and that's awkward; for then he takes his own share and somebody else's too."

"By a properly-adjusted system of checks—" placidly continued the philosopher.

"O, confound it, don't let us get into the banking system!" broke out the traveller, in perfect good faith and seriously alarmed.

Everybody laughed; and Garth felt convinced he had said a very witty thing.

"I shouldn't mind giving the fellows votes," Eastham said, "if our bigwigs saw their way to it. I don't think it would matter in the least. I am not a bit afraid of the working man; and on my word I don't see why he shouldn't have votes as well as any of us. But I don't profess to be a wise man or a great politician; and I follow my instincts, which, according to Hamerfield, it is a dreadfully wrong thing to do."

"That is, you follow them *here*?" said Mr. Garth.

"Yes, here, of course," Eastham replied simply. "I don't carry crotchets into the House. Here I have my own opinions,

and I talk them out ; *there* I follow my leader into the lobby, and hold my tongue."

"A man," said Hamerfield, "who surrenders his individuality, his independent power of judgment, is in my mind a slave."

"Thanks for the compliment. But I thought the campaign against Russia rather foolish ; and I began to suspect that our military chiefs, or some of them, were no better than old women. Yet when our regiment was ordered to cross the Alma, I thought it rather better to surrender my individuality and go at my work, than set to argue the question of tactics with my superiors."

"In war and politics," Garth politely remarked, "we are governed and served by mere machines. I often heard it was so ; now I begin to see it."

"You are a Tory, Captain Eastham, I believe ;" Lennon asked, looking with interest at the young man.

"Certainly. Genuine true blue."

"And Mr. Hamerfield is a Liberal ?"

"An educated Liberal," Warton interpolated on behalf of his friend.

"Philosophical Radical," muttered Garth.

"Then I only get more and more puzzled with the new aspects of English politics," said Lennon. "Liberalism long ago meant an extended and popular vote—Toryism something like Divine Right, and all that sort of thing."

"You see, Mr. Lennon," Hamerfield proceeded to explain, "we have had reason of late years to note practically the disturbing effects of the mere power of numbers in the business of government. Mere agglomeration of numbers does not represent arithmetical, far less geometrical, increase of the intellectual force and the moral power which we find to be ordained, alike in the philosophical and in the religious sense, for the task of governing. The problem which England just now has to solve is to combine the maximum of intellectual and moral strength with the minimum of the disturbing and disorganising influences. This I, for one, propose to do by a system of checks and balances, which I will not attempt to develop just now."

"That's a good fellow," Eastham observed. "Nothing bores me, for one, so much as the checks and balances. Nobody thinks of doing anything with them in the House, and it is a waste of time to talk about them out of doors. Sometimes I think our fellows would do well to adopt the whole dodge—

checks and balances and all. It would be a capital plan of evading a practical change of any kind."

The talk went on in this way. We need not pursue it any further. Each man threw out his own ideas, or what he supposed to be his ideas, wholly irrespective of anything which might be suggested by his neighbour. The one thing which occupied Lennon's attention during the whole time was the evident desire of Warton to avoid declaring himself, or indeed saying anything definite on any political subject. Lennon had really no particular political views left in him. His early politics had been the feverish dreams of wild, antagonistic, aggressive youth, and when the dreams faded they left nothing, or next to nothing, behind. But he was anxious to hear something which might explain Warton's alleged tergiversation, or refute the charge. He heard nothing. Warton would say nothing one way or the other. Lennon was disappointed. He was studying Warton's character, for reasons wholly unpolitical. He was anxious to discover what kind of heart and nature Mabel Ethelstone had intrusted her happiness and her life to. Thus far the conjecture was unsatisfactory.

Hours passed, and the friends—at least the guests—separated. Warton asked Lennon to stay yet a little; to come into the smoking-room and have a cigar. Lennon accepted the invitation. He could not avoid doing so. It would have been to miss the purpose of his coming if he had not remained. For as yet he had heard no word of Mabel.

The smoking-room was a solitude when they went in. Most people were out of town. It was a mere chance that Captain Eastham and Garth were within the confines of the metropolis.

Lennon and Warton smoked for a few moments almost in silence—at least, only exchanging a word or two of comment on this unimportant thing and person or that. Lennon noted how worn and almost wasted under certain lights Warton's face seemed. As the latter sat and smoked in silence, deep imprints of anxiety, care, and disappointment began to come out under his eyes, like flaws detected by the sunlight. Suddenly, and as if with a kind of effort, Warton looked up and said:

"You will come to see us at home, will you not? At once—before you leave town?"

"Yes; I mean to do so. To-morrow, indeed, if you will allow me."

"That's a good fellow. Mabel will be *so* glad. She always thought so much of *you*."

Lennon's brown face grew a deeper colour, and he did not venture to look up. Warton's eye was on him, and he felt it. He was almost as embarrassed as a schoolboy, when his playmates chaff him about some girl with a satchel and trousers.

"Lennon—Ralph Lennon," Warton went on, speaking in a low, thrilling voice, admirably toned for the occasion, "I know I gave you pain *once*. I know all that. But you do not blame me; you are too manly and generous. I see that you have not quite forgotten the whole affair; your feelings were too deep and true to pass away. But it was not my fault if I was—" he actually stammered over the words—"more fortunate; as God knows, it was no merit of mine. You were in every way more worthy—and therefore you did not succeed! But we are friends? Give me your hand."

Lennon looked up, and extended his hand. There was a warm clasp. "I have wronged him," was Ralph's thought. And he gladdened to think it.

"You were more worthy of her, dear old friend," Warton went on. "Many a time have I wished that you had been successful."

There was a force of sincerity about this which startled our friend; and his eyes spoke surprise and doubt. But the effect was not unexpected.

"Yes, I have wished it often; for I am not worthy, as you would have been, of any loving woman's heart; and I see little chance of making *her* happy, as she ought to be made. Mine is a weary, wasting, undomestic, homeless sort of life. I am chasing the shadows of an ambition that only leads me away; and I do it, as she knows, for her—to make for her such a place in life as she deserves to have, and ought to have."

"Then Mabel has grown ambitious," Lennon thought. "She, too, wants to rise into society. Who could have expected this? It was not thus," &c., &c. But he said nothing.

"For that *we* sacrifice the present; and who knows whether we are ever likely to be rewarded with any success? I am a poor man, Lennon, and thus far a disappointed man. You are surprised."

"I am indeed. I heard of you as a splendid success; on the high road to fortune and distinction, and I know not

what. I heard of you in Switzerland as one of the rising men of the time."

"In Switzerland? Who told you of me? I did know James Fazy a little, but—"

"No, it was no Swiss politician, or politician of any kind; it was an English clergyman who spoke to me of you—Dr. Alwyn of Waterdale. I met him, with his wife, at Lucerne."

"Yes, the Alwyns: I know them well. You saw Alwyn's wife? Is she not a charming creature? Did *she* speak of me?"

Light gleamed in Warton's eyes for a moment, and then went out. He purposely extinguished it, and dropped at once into a different tone of voice, without waiting for Lennon's answer.

"And the Alwyns told you I was a very successful man! Well, I daresay I seem so. I make speeches, and I dine at places, and I try to get into parliament, and I don't succeed. So far the success is all barren. I am as poor as when I began, and the party I served—served only too well, Lennon!—if I had served my God as well!—cared nothing for me; repudiated me in the end."

He jumped up and stood upon the hearth-rug, his back to the fireplace, his face towards Lennon. He was quite in earnest now.

"Perhaps you were surprised to find me—me, of all persons—ranging myself even for an hour on a Tory side. But I tell you, Lennon, there is no hope for England, for anyone, from the selfish crew of calculators, economists, and sophists—splendid words, those of Burke's!—who call themselves Liberals. Confound them all! What do they care for the people, or for talents, or for anything but their cursed commerce and cotton, and all the rest of it. I believed in them long enough; but I don't any longer; and they shall know it too, or my life shall be all a failure."

Ralph Lennon's heart warmed to the earnestness of his friend. He was about to make some sincere and sympathetic declaration, but there was no possibility of interjecting anything just yet. Warton streamed away:

"I worked for them and spoke for them, in season and out, when anybody but myself speaking for them to a meeting of English working men would have been hooted off the platform.

And they thanked me by repudiating me when I stood in need of their help ; and they put up some tongueless Manchester drone—some local Moneybags—to stand against me ; and the brute now sits in the House, fat and stolid, and never opens his mouth but to cry ‘Hear, hear.’ They only believe in money—and I have none. This is my success. I am not in the House ; I see at present little chance of getting in ; and I find my way—for I have pitched my own profession and its chances clean overboard—growing more and more dark and difficult every day. Yes, old fellow, I do wish sometimes that you had had the success which once divided us—for it did divide us ; there’s no use in pretending not to know that—and that I had been defeated and had gone to the Antipodes—or the devil. At least, no one would have been entangled in my fate ; and *you* might have made her happy ! Perhaps I have drunk too much wine, or I wouldn’t talk in this way. But I’m glad of it, for it relieves my mind ; and there is no man on earth to whom, with wine or without, I could speak thus except *you*.”

Assuredly, Warton had not drunk too much wine. Lennon could not help noticing once or twice at table how remarkably abstemious his host was. The sin of excess in drinking was not one of Warton’s faults. Perhaps he was too much of an epicure for such coarse indulgence. He only liked to sip the first fragrance of fine wines, as the gourmand bites the one supremely rosy and delicate spot from the cheek of a peach.

But Lennon was decidedly warming to his friend. His own naturally rebellious nature responded to even a murmur of rebellion. He had for many years had a vague suspicion that Warton acted treacherously towards him—he could not tell how—in the old love-rivalry ; that his rival had managed somehow to give him the *coup de Jarnac*. So one of the things he meant to do with the greatest caution, now that he had come back to England, was to study Warton’s real character. But the heat of Warton’s words carried him away. He thought he saw in him only pride, ambition—self-conceit, perhaps—and fearless straightforwardness. Warton looked handsome, graceful, young ; his voice sounded sweet and rich. “I don’t wonder a woman loved him,” thought Ralph ; “and I am sure she loves him still—and he her. And that is happiness.”

He would have broken into some stammering, sincere assurance of friendship and trust, and earnest wish by any means to serve, but that a pair of loungers came into the room. The

swearing of eternal friendship, therefore, did not come off, and both were saved any chance of being foresworn, which was perhaps fortunate.

Ralph presently rose to go away. Warton gave him a card with the address of Mabel's house on it. "We live modestly," he said, "but people can be happy without fine houses. And I will do better for her one day—or fail utterly."

Ralph wrung his hand warmly, and said nothing. As he was leaving the place, Warton added, "I may not be there, perhaps—I have ever so many people to meet to-morrow; but I will come to you before you leave town—and I will see you in the North, too, before long."

"At last," thought Ralph, as he smoked his cigar and walked in the direction of Charing-cross, "I am to see *her* again. To-morrow!"

"He is to live near *her*," thought Warton, "to see her every day. How charming she is! What eyes and what spirit! And he is to live near her! He has all the luck! Well, he is a manly fellow, and has a generous heart. I will go to see him in Cumberland as soon as I can snatch a few days. *They* told him of me! I wonder what *she* said."

He sat a long time, thoughtful and depressed. When men whom he knew came in, he spoke but little. When the room began to fill, he got up and went away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD LOVE.

"**M**ABEL!"

The word came out suddenly, unconsciously—a sort of low cry. All the full expression of a whole soul of feeling was in it. But she to whom it was addressed looked at first with blank surprise upon the speaker, then, recovering herself and mentally alighting upon something like a track of explanation, smiled faintly, and blushed. The speaker, however, stood silent and embarrassed. He had clearly made a mistake, but he could not explain or understand it just yet. He was addressing a total stranger.

But the stranger in a moment recovered her full composure, and became mistress of the situation.

"You are Mr. Lennon, I know," she said, extending her hand. "Allow me to welcome you without ceremony to England and to this place, and to introduce myself."

The morning after he had left Warton, Ralph Lennon went down by an early train to the little town where Warton kept what he called his home. Lennon was of course impatient, got down far too early, became ashamed and irresolute, looked at his watch, and resolved to wait a little for a more seasonable hour. He easily found Warton's house, and he walked up and down in front of it several times, until he began to be afraid of being noticed or watched; and then he wandered away and got out into the country, among quiet lanes softly lighted and tinted by the autumn sun. He returned, and came towards the house; and when in sight of it lingered and turned away again. Now that he was so near, now that the time he had so yearned for was at hand, he hesitated and shrank, and debated within himself whether he had any business in being there at all. Every objection that the most prudent or timid or prudish mind could have suggested to a weakly conscience sprang up within him. What if the old passion, which he believed or hoped lay dead in his heart, should arise out of the sepulchre again at the sight of her face, and the sound of her voice? What if the new and purer and more practical life he was entering upon should vanish the moment she arose once more upon its horizon, and the old frenzy claim command of him again? He positively dreaded the return of passion—disappointed passion—as a poor creature in his intervals of reason sickens and shudders at the thought of returning madness. For Lennon had studied himself through long and lonely years; and he knew that the fierce central fire of passion only slept and smouldered in his heart. In the core of our little planet, the scientific men tell us, there is even within the belt of fire a solid mass, kept firm and hard, amid all the fervour of the heat around, by the mere force of the pressure that is on it. What Lennon did not feel sure of was, whether in the microcosm of his nature there was any solid indissoluble kernel of conscience which the furnace of passion, however fiercely stirred, would work upon in vain. But at last he shook off all hesitation. "Too late," he said to himself, "to think of all this now. I am certainly not quite a boy; and I hope I am not quite a fool."

And then he marched resolutely towards the house, as one who has business there about which there need be no pretence or hesitation. A tax-collector could not have made his way more determinedly. Head bent downward, and looking neither to the right nor the left, he strode on. It was only when he had his hand upon the latch of the little wooden door in the "rustic" paling of the tiny lawn, that he looked up and saw the figure of a woman just before him. A slender, firm, shapely young woman, with bright short hair, thick around her head, and beautiful deep-brown eyes. The sunshine fell upon her head, upon her thick fair hair—falling on them from behind, so that her face and her eyes showed more distinctly in the light. And the face, the hair, the figure, the eyes—above all, the eyes—were so like those which in Lennon's memory an imperishable youth embalmed and glorified, that for the moment he forgot the lapse of years, forgot the thick and grizzling beard which covered half his face, forgot Australia, and the long absence and silence, and the dead hopes, and the promise that lay buried by the side of gold streams and in the pathless bush—forgot all, and was a boy of twenty-one again, and saw Mabel Ethelstone standing before him. And then there came, as from the lips of one who dreams, the cry of "Mabel!" and in a moment Lennon came back to himself, thought he had been making himself ridiculous, and stood embarrassed and hesitating under the eyes of a pretty girl.

The pretty girl, however, restored him to composure.

"We have been expecting you, Mr. Lennon," she said; "that is, Mabel has. Walter told us you had returned to England, and that you would come and see us. Mabel will be so delighted to see you. I should tell you that I am Mabel's niece, for I have not been very long living here, and I dare say you never heard of me before. I have heard of you, though, and I am glad to see you."

"You must have been quite a child when I left England," Lennon said, as much to himself as to her.

So confused had he become after his first mistake, that his mind for a while lost count of years, and he began to wonder whether the girl so like Mabel might not be Mabel's daughter. It was quite a relief to him to hear that she was only her niece. Then he thought what a fool he must be to suppose a grown woman—quite a woman, he had beautiful, rounded, shapely evidence under his eyes—could be Mabel's child.

Then he asked gravely, and not ungracefully, after Mabel's health, and her children, and signified a wish to see her, and was conducted into the house and left alone in a drawing-room. The truth is, Mabel was asleep,—she always slept an hour or so every afternoon,—and Grace herself went to waken her up. Ralph Lennon had a good many minutes to look at the books on the table—an odd mixture : for there was Mabel's *Tupper*, which she dearly loved ; and there were piles of pamphlets belonging to—many written by—Warton ; and there were the schoolbooks out of which Grace taught the children ; and there was Plumptre's *Sophocles*, which Grace delighted to read ; and there were some Italian, French, and German authors, which she loved quite as well, and could read without borrowing the spectacles of any translator.

Lennon was turning over the books when a quick footfall made him start and flush. There was a rustling, indeed a rushing, of billowy silk into the room ; a sweet, deep voice, called out, "O Ralph, dear old friend, welcome home to England !" two warm lips pressed his cheek, or his beard ; and then he clearly saw Mabel Warton standing before him. And—dreadful thing to say to those who like to think that love is all spiritual and mental, and not a thing trammelled to the flesh—a shock went through poor Lennon's frame, and the love that had been kept alive through disappointment and struggle, and success and failure, and pain and pleasure, dropped down dead at Mabel Warton's feet. Dead past hope, past cure ; not to be revived, surely, even by that last trumpet which is orthodoxically expected to unpeople so many graves.

The illusion was gone ; and Lennon, cured of his fevered dream, like the man in Horace, felt bitterly aggrieved against the fate which restored reality and banished an exquisite and false imagining.

But the full force of the shock was not appreciated all at once ; and Ralph soon found himself sketching in rapid outline the history of his past life. Probably Mabel did not care much about the details, and had a very vague notion of what sort of place Australia might be—having dropped all manner of acquaintance with it ever since school-time, when she used to be taught that it was called Australasia, and had no clearer idea about it than that it was a place where a traveller must inevitably fall among thieves. When Lennon talked of Victoria she of course assumed that he was speaking of some sort of place—a

town or something out there—and not of the Queen of England, which would be absurd ; but beyond that she did not know, and did not want to know. Her interest was wholly in the man, in dear old Ralph Lennon, and not in his adventures. And while he was sketching out his life of the last dozen years or so, dashing off the lines rather to cover his own embarrassment than for any other reason, the good Mabel was thinking whether he would stay to dinner ; whether Warton would come to dine ; what she and her niece could do to amuse Ralph if he did not ; and how sorry she was that she happened to be asleep when he came, and therefore was not dressed ; and that he must have known she was dressing ; and how glad she was that she had put on her blue silk, because it looked so well.

Then she talked a little : told him about the children, whom he must see presently ; about Walter being *so* much engaged ; about her niece being so good a girl, and such a comfort to her.

“I hope you are happy,” said Ralph, hardly knowing that he spoke the words.

“Happy !” she answered ; O yes ! That is, as happy as anyone can be, I suppose. As happy as I could be while—while Walter is so much away.”

There was a look of tenderness and truth about her which was touching, which made her seem almost beautiful—almost romantic, ideal, and Madonna-like. A strange pang passed through Lennon’s heart.

“And you, Ralph ?” she asked gently, kindly ; “you are happy, are you not ? And you are wise, and have sown all your wild oats—your foolish, boyish, wild oats ?”

“Yes,” he replied slowly, and rather sadly ; “I have grown wise, I suppose ; I hope. At least, I have outlived much foolishness, and roused myself from some dreamings.”

These words might be called the elegy of his long passion. They were the short funeral oration pronounced over his great dead love. Perhaps Mabel, too, so understood them. A quiet smile, radiant with true and kindly feeling, diffused once more a sort of ideal beauty over her face. No word of allusion to that chapter of the past which they two had read together and alone was ever again exchanged between them.

Walton Warton did, luckily for Mabel’s comfort, make his appearance very soon, and Lennon dined with them ; and they

even found a room for him, and insisted on his passing the night under their roof. The evening was tranquil and happy ; but Lennon went to bed with an odd sensation of blankness and vacuity at his heart, and was pervaded by a vague doubt of his having any particular business in life.

CHAPTER IX.

AND THE NEW.

CHILDREN now do not read the story of Fortunio ; it is probably out of print ; and this writer, though remembering the tale well enough, does not know who wrote it, or in what collection it is found, except that it is not in the *Arabian Nights*. But it is a charming story. It is about a girl whose father was dead, and whose mother and sisters were in difficulties of some kind, and who, having a spirit far too high for inactivity and starvation, resolved to pull them out of all trouble by her own unaided effort and enterprise. So she dressed herself as a man, and went out to seek her fortune ; which she found in the shape of some dreadful adventures and daring exploits, whereby she won the gratitude of the king—the king of all the stories. Unhappily, however, she also won the love of the king's daughter ; and this was, for some reason or other, a deadly offence, and Fortunio was doomed to die. She was to be shot to death with arrows, like the wife of the Peruvian prince who had offended Pizarro. Now in most stories and plays and poems of a certain kind, it is assumed to be a necessary preliminary to death by any sharp instrument that the breast must be bared. Indeed, only the other day in Paris a despairing young milliner resolved to kill herself with a dagger ; and she accomplished the deed with a stern unfaltering resolution worthy of a Brutus ; only before doing it she took the trouble partly to bare her breast, and to put on the prettiest trimmed under garment, that the death and the corpse might be picturesque and Parisian. There was less excuse for her than in the Fortunio instance, because in the latter case the baring of the breast was absolutely essential to the story, which was by no means the case with the Paris heroine. But when Fortunio's white young bosom came to be uncovered, the king

necessarily saw that he was dooming a girl to death, and for an offence which she could not possibly commit ; and of course he pardoned her, and she triumphed, and I think married the king's son in the end, and made all her family happy.

In these days the little fairy story may be taken as a sort of timely parable. We are told that signs are everywhere visible of a feminine revolt against petticoats. Women are invading our monopolies and sanctuaries and privileged grounds everywhere ; but the moral of Fortunio may perhaps remind them that, do what they will, the soft bosom will some time or other reveal itself, and that it, their womanhood, must make their best success in the end. "O, if I were but a man !" may be taken as the passionate aspiration, spoken or unspoken, of at least every other woman of spirit one meets. A great lady of our own time—a woman full of ambition, but kept by her very rank, perhaps, in a sort of background—was deploring one day to a confidential diplomatist that she could not make the politics of her country go exactly as she wished. "Ah, I could do something in politics," said she, "if I wore *that* ;" and she touched his manly coat. "You are far better armed for the purpose in wearing *this*," replied the statesman ; and he lightly shook the folds of her womanly skirt. But the world is filled, now more than ever, with unfavoured Fortunios, who long to enter the path of enterprise in man's attire, and find their woman's sphere painfully narrow and mean and pitiful.

One of these was Mabel Warton's niece. Day by day she grew more weary of her narrow, monotonous, routine life, with its petty cares and small shifts and shabby Sisyphus struggles. Never having been at school,—never having set foot inside that hideous institution for the dwarfing of woman's mind and the withering of her heart, a boarding-school,—she had always something of a high ideal life before her, which she would have striven to attain if she could. She longed to be an artist. It has already been mentioned that her strong desire and determination were to go and live in Rome, and study there and carve in marble. Art alone—the sculptor's art alone—seemed to offer a fair hope for the realization of anything worth calling perfect. Meanwhile she had to put off this desire from day to day, and steep her life in trivialities. She read everything that came in her way—literally everything, without attempt at order or purpose or study. She read leading articles and

poems indiscriminately ; the greatest works of the past and present, and the most rubbishy novel from the circulating library. Her process of reading the latter sort of book, however, was very rapid and summary. She tore through its contents in a moment—a figurative moment at least—disembowelled it, plucked out the heart of its mystery, and then, if it was good for nothing, threw it away, never to be glanced at again. If, however, it proved to have any marrow in it, then she read it more carefully, got whatever was good in it, and left the rest to go. Thus from almost every measuring process of this kind her mind, like Cassim Baba's cup, retained some coin of gold. Her energy, seeking a suitable end, was always grasping around it in every direction ; and so she had accumulated an odd miscellaneous store of materials, which it only wanted some ordering and superior mind to help her to put to use.

Indeed, the kind of life she was now leading would have precluded order of study. She read only by fits and snatches, and must grasp greedily all she could crowd into the time, as a hungry traveller at a railway station pounces on anything he can find close to hand, and swallows it, knowing that in a moment the inexorable bell will ring and he must go. She taught the children as well as she could ; she ordered the house ; she controlled and helped the servants ; she paid the bills ; she made the two ends meet when she could. To keep that household out of debt or out of actual poverty was of late becoming a very difficult task. To think about art and about tradesmen's bills at the same time is not easy even to the professional artist ; and poor Grace's artistic heaven was often confused by dull clouds of commonplace and petty difficulties. She could of course have shaken off the whole connection in a moment, have stamped the dust from her feet, and gone her own way whither that led her. Her own little purse would have kept her somehow in Rome ; and nobody had any fair claim on her time or her money. But she was fond of her aunt—in a sort of pitying way. Mabel had been very kind and loving to her when she was an orphan girl ; and she was grateful, and could not go her own way, and leave the gentle helpless woman lonely. Then the children were very fond of her, and could be managed by her ; and she was fond of them ; and she somehow came vaguely to think that evil days were in store for them ; and her soul revolted against the

idea of deserting them, even for art. So she remained—thinking, perhaps, that if all roads led to Rome, there might be a path thither at last, even through such a moor of petty, prosaic English cares as she had now to traverse.

She had never felt, thus far, one single throb of affection for any male creature on earth except her father, who was long dead, and little Watty Warton, who was sometimes as annoying to her as a gadfly. She often wished to be a man, but never cared much about knowing men. Indeed, she almost took it for granted that when you came to know a man well he was sure to turn out something like Walter Warton, as the latter showed himself in her clear, undazzled eyes.

Miss Ethelstone felt little or no interest in the expected visit of Ralph Lennon. She knew that he had been a lover of Mabel's, and she therefore assumed that he must be a very uninteresting person. She quite understood Mabel, and knew her to be gentle, sweet, mindless, and weak; she remembered her nothing else so long as she could recollect at all. She saw that Walter Warton never cared to talk to her or commune with her; and she assumed that any man who really loved her must be a worthy, vapid, and commonplace person. Few women of her age—not many, perhaps, of any age—understand how powerful the merely womanly weapons are over men. They cannot comprehend how the soft light of a bright eye, the soft accents of a sweet voice, can not only glamour a man into love, but make him believe a simpering idiot is a creature all soul, sensibility, and intellect. They do not understand that womanhood has charms to men—especially to young men—merely because it is womanhood. There are seasons in the career of young and generous men when almost any creature with a fair face and sweet voice may take them by the hand and lead them where she will. Few stately oldsters there are, if they ever knew youth's more generous feeling at all, who might not make confession that there was a crisis in their lives when only good fortune saved them from marrying some pretty brainless girl out of a confectioner's shop, or some actress whose dramatic genius lay wholly in her shapely legs.

Therefore Grace took little notice of Mabel's first and unsuccessful lover when he came to the house *that* day. She was friendly and kind to him for Mabel's sake, regarding him as somebody quite out of her own sphere altogether, and looking at him only with that slight indirect interest which a girl

might feel towards one who was pointed out to her as having proposed for her mother ever so many years ago.

Lennon rose rather early the next morning. He had been restless and unhappy. He felt humbled, somehow, and disappointed. Life looked all prosaic and vulgar. The one deep sentiment of his life thus far was gone. He had clung to it as something that gave his better nature food to live on when "the dreary intercourse of daily life" was done. There is a secret pride as well as a luxury in sorrow. The nature which disdains all other egotism indulges itself freely in egotism of that kind. There is a sense of sublimity in disappointment unflinchingly borne—we like to think of ourselves as of the camel mutely straining beneath the heaviest load, or the wolf dying in silence. If we have only ourselves for sympathisers and admirers, if our own consciousness be the only stage we play to, yet there is something inspiriting, even in acting our part in such a theatre, to deserve the applause of such an audience. It is a fall to pride to find that we have really lost nothing ; that we ought to be rather glad, and not disappointed. It turns the tragedy into a farce ; or, what is worse, into an ordinary, unheroic business transaction.

Ralph walked out into the little garden behind the house. Evidently Walter and Mabel were not yet up. The whole place looked peaceful, smiling, and happy. Lennon's heroic beneficence was clearly as much out of place as his heroic passion. Commonplace contentment and respectability seemed to reign over all. So he felt as he looked at the pleasant garden, on which the mild sun of late autumn was shining through a thin haze of early frost.

He heard the laugh of children, and it awakened him healthily from the sensuous enjoyment of meditation. Lennon was glad. He liked the fine boy he had seen the evening before, and was glad to have a talk and a romp with him. He loved saucy, noisy boys, and in the London streets relished the street-sweeping, match-selling, coach-wheel-turning *gamin* most of all the ordinary features of London life. So he quickly followed the sound, and it led him to a little summer-house—one of those mock-rustic affairs which Londoners love ; which you buy ready-made and all standing, and set up like a water-butt ; and which is about the size of a good sentry-box. And here he found the two children, and found also—less, perhaps, to his delight—their cousin. She was bare-headed, like the

young ones, and was playing some game or other with them. She was not in the least disconcerted.

"Good-morning, Mr. Lennon," she said; "I hardly expected to see you up so early. We are very early risers, the children and I. Watty is delighted to see you, I am sure. Someone has been telling him that you saw lions, and could tell him all about them; and he delights in lions."

"O, yes, Mr. Lennon," the boy cried, struggling out of some handkerchief-knot in which he had been tied, "mamma says you saw lions."

"Yes, Watty, often. Shall I tell you all about them?"

"Yes, please; but look here. Mamma says you hunted lions in Australia; but I have a natural-history book, and it says there are no lions in Australia."

"No, my boy, nor are there—except in zoological gardens, as you have them here; but it was in Africa."

"O, you were in Africa! In the desert of Sahara? And did you ever ride on an ostrich?"

"No, not in the desert of Sahara, but in other parts of Africa; and I never rode on an ostrich. But I have seen great yellow lions, out on the sand—not in cages—and heard them roar, and shot at them, too."

"O, how jolly! And did you kill any?"

"Well, yes; I helped to kill some, at least; and I have got the skin of one, which I'll show you."

"Have you got it here?"

"No; but I have it in Cumberland, where I am living now; and I should be glad to take you there with me for a while. Will you come?"

"O, I'd like to come of all things—if mamma would let me."

"Would you go without papa and mamma, Watty?" asked his grave sister, in tone of solemn childish reproof.

"Why, papa isn't ever here, Maby, and mamma doesn't care for playing and all that.—But I'd like Maby to come, Mr. Lennon, and cousin Gracie, too. You'll take cousin Gracie, Mr. Lennon, won't you?"

"I'll not go, Mr. Lennon," demurely said the little girl, returning to her point, "unless mamma and papa go."

"Now, Maby, that's all your nonsense—you know we never see papa here."

"Your papa is here now, Watty, dear," interposed Miss Ethelstone.

But Watty was not to be put down. "O, we'll go, Mr. Lennon, never mind," he went on sturdily. "Papa won't know anything about it until we are back again."

Lennon's eye rested involuntarily on the young woman who stood near him. She had coloured deeply, and her whole manner suggested anxiety and embarrassment. He came to the rescue :

"Well, Watty, I hope your papa will come too. But now I'm going to tell you a story about a lion—a huge, dreadful lion ; the one whose skin I have, and mean to show you."

How unfortunate, in one sense—how untimely, at all events—that Miss Ethelstone should have looked up, relieved and rejoiced ! For Lennon's eye again involuntarily turned towards her, and their glances met. And Lennon's look, though it endured not a second of time, said, as plainly as if words had expressed it, "I see that something is wrong here ;" and her look replied, "I see that you know it."

Lennon went on and told his story, making it pretty long too, and minute in its details ; for he knew that the longer he could make it, and the more completely he could absorb the attention of his one listener, the better all the party would be pleased.

But the story came to an end at last.

"Do you go to school, Watty ?" asked Lennon, saying anything to start a new topic.

"No, I don't," said the boy. "But I learn, though—lots of things."

"Mamma teaches you ?"

"O, no ; mamma don't teach us ; cousin Gracie does. We had a governess, but she went away when Gracie came. I'm so glad ; she was a nasty, cross old thing ; and she used to make mamma cry sometimes."

"And what do you learn, Watty ?"

"All sorts of things : globes, and sums on the slate—and Gracie's wrong in her sums sometimes, I know—and drawing. O, isn't she first-rate at drawing ! She drew me a lion yesterday, and a man on horse fighting with him. It's stunning ! She's going to Rome soon—and I'm going with her."

"Do you intend to study art, Miss Ethelstone ?"

"I have had vague dreams of that kind for a long time, but they don't come to anything. I should very much like to study in Rome."

"And become a professional artist?"

"Yes, Mr. Lennon. I don't see why women should lounge idly through life; and, at all events, I can't do it. I must make a living." There now, thought the girl, if he is a swell, and thinks I am going to set up for a fine lady, that will let him know at once that he is mistaken.

"I think you are perfectly right," Lennon quietly remarked. "In the country where I lived so long—Australia—women do not lounge away their lives in idleness. And we—I mean they—in that country have had their woman-artists, who have crossed the great ocean and studied their art in Rome, and come back and made a fame for themselves—at least, a colonial fame. I don't suppose their names ever reached England; but out there we used to be proud of some of them."

"Are you an artist, Mr. Lennon?"

"No, not at all; at least, it would be really absurd to call anything I do by the name of art. But I am fond of drawing now and then; and above all human arts I love sculpture."

"O, and so do I!" She coloured, and became quite enthusiastic. "I love it better than anything. I look at a fine statue in delight—and despair. I should so love to make a group—I have the idea firmly in my mind—of *Œdipus* and *Antigone*."

"*Œdipus* and *Antigone*! From *Sophocles*!"

"There! I knew you would laugh. Men always laugh at the idea of a woman being able to read Greek. But you need not smile in this case; I am not guilty—I wish I were. I know no more of Greek than Watty does. But we have got *Plumptre's* translation, and I read it; and the moment I read the grand opening line of the play—'Child of a blind old man, *Antigone*!'—I made up my mind that I would try to make a group of that. I see the group—but only when I shut my eyes, though; and I daresay I shall never see it otherwise." She laughed and became a little embarrassed, fearing she had made rather a foolish exhibition; and she glanced doubtfully at Lennon's face. He was quite earnest and interested.

"Have you made a drawing of it?" he asked.

"Yes; but it did not satisfy me. I made several, in fact; but very hastily, and they did not come up to the mark, and so I tore them up."

"Will you make another, and show it to me? and I will tell you frankly what I think of it. As I said, I am not an

artist, but I am fond of art, and of sculpture especially ; and I have been in Rome, and have seen most of the great European statues ; and I think I could form a tolerable judgment."

"And you would be frank with me—would give me a perfectly honest and candid opinion, and not treat me like a child, or a girl ; I mean as men generally seem to think girls ought to be treated ? I want an honest judgment ; for, if these notions of mine are mere nonsense and vanity, the sooner I get cured of them the better. And I could bear it, too."

"But suppose the idea were a delusion—suppose it were only aspiration, and nothing of inspiration—how should you feel towards the friend who told you so ?"

"I hope I should have sense enough to be grateful ; at least, I would try to. But what need it matter to him, if he did right ?"

"Well, Miss Ethelstone, if you allow me the opportunity, I will run the risk of your anger, and try to give an unprejudiced opinion. But I warn you that my mind is already tending towards prejudice. I hope and trust that an earnest desire is in itself an evidence of capacity. Once I used to hold to this as a creed ; but that was in more hopeful days, ever so long ago,—before you were born, I daresay."

"What nonsense ! Why, you are quite young—much younger than I expected to find you. I thought you must be quite an elderly and heavy sort of person."

"Why did you think so ?"

"Because—because—O, really, I don't know." And she gave way to an involuntary peal of laughter, and grew quite red once more. And Lennon laughed too, and the merry outburst somewhat cleared the atmosphere of his temper and spirits.

Just at that moment Warton, in search of his guest, entered the garden. He was about to hurry forward when the peal of laughter attracted his attention, and his eyes rested on the group, composed of Lennon, Grace, and the children, one of the latter hanging on to Ralph's shooting-coat pocket. Warton checked himself, and watched the group with an expression of peculiar interest. Miss Ethelstone, in a bright-blue morning-dress, and a smart (and very cheap) straw hat, with her fair hair, guiltless of chignon or comb, gleaming in the pale sun, and her complexion heightened and expression animated by unwonted interest and mirth, was a very attractive figure. So

Warton thought. Only of late had his attention been much drawn towards her. To him the familiar was usually the least noticed and the least known. But latterly he had been compelled to notice once or twice that she was really a girl of spirit and sense ; he had discovered by the agency of one or two divining words that she had ambition and fire, and he began to see that she had some pretensions to beauty and figure. He looked at her now as she walked and laughed by Lennon's side, and his whole face was lighted up by some quick encouraging thought.

He went forward and greeted them.

"Miss Ethelstone has been telling me," said Lennon, "that she thought I was quite an aged and stupid person."

"O no, Walter ; indeed I never said anything of the kind."

"Well, elderly and heavy, then."

"But that was nonsense."

"I should hope it was nonsense," said Warton gaily. "I have personal reasons for it, Grace dear, seeing that Mr. Lennon is somewhat younger than I am ; and I don't advise you to tell Mabel that you consider me elderly and heavy."

"Papa," interposed Watty, "mayn't I go with Mr. Lennon to where he lives, to see a lion's skin ? I do so want to go."

"Certainly, dear, if Mr. Lennon will be so good as to take you."

"And mayn't cousin Grace go too ?"

"Really, Watty, I can't speak for cousin Grace. She goes where she likes, you know."

"No, she doesn't, papa. She don't go anywhere. How could she when she has to teach us, you know, since Miss Potts went away ? O, but you don't know."

"But, Watty, I don't care about lions," interposed cousin Grace ; "and besides, perhaps Mr. Lennon would not take me."

"Yes, I'm sure he would, if you asked him ; when you show him how well you can do your drawing-lessons."

"We have been speaking about sculpture and drawing," interposed Lennon. "I was glad to find Miss Ethelstone is an artist."

"No, no, Mr. Lennon, I don't call myself an artist."

"Yes, Grace has the soul and spirit of an artist," said Warton, who up to that moment had regarded any indication of that kind which he might have noticed in the girl as a pitiable manifestation of woman's inherent silliness. "She has a passion

for art ; and I at least have always believed that a true woman's ambition indicates a consciousness of power."

Miss Ethelstone fell behind with a scarcely concealed smile of contempt and tremulous motion of disdainful shoulder. She took little Mabel's hand and walked with her. "I wonder whether your mamma has come downstairs yet, dear ?" she said to the little girl ; and thus glided out of the artistic conversation altogether.

Warton saw and understood the meaning of her movement, but was only amused ; and, in fact, began to feel quite a heightening interest in her. But he did not proceed to dwell upon her good qualities to Lennon any further just then.

They were all walking round the little garden. When they came near the door of the house, a rushing of skirts was heard, and Mabel came out. She was dressed rather tastefully, and looked genial, happy—and heavy. Her soft eyes brightened with a friendly smile to Lennon ; but they turned with the rapture of a first love to her husband, to whom she presently clung, and on whom she fawned like a loving but heavy spaniel. But why, when she put her hand so warmly into his own and allowed it to rest there kindly, and greeted him with so glad and cordial a smile, did Lennon glance slightly away from her and steal a look at her niece's face ? And was it only an absurd fancy which made him think he saw a satirical and odd expression there ?

One thing at least he was sincerely glad of, and that was Mabel's evident devotion to her husband. He thought he could interpret easily enough the meaning of some of the little evidences which had forced themselves on his attention. He could not doubt that Warton was habitually an absentee from his home ; and he could not avoid conjecturing that the home was not so free of care as he had at first imagined. But Warton's frequent absence, as he was an ambitious man, and steeped in politics, was not surprising. Warton himself had prepared him to expect as much. Neither was it wonderful if, under the circumstances, a want of money occasionally pinched the household of an ambitious man to whom politics were but a trade. What gratified Lennon was to see that after so many years Mabel Warton deeply loved her husband. He supposed that no undeserving man could have retained that love, or any woman's love, so long ; and he thought that whatever difficulties might surround the household, Mabel had that which

to a woman is better than all other prosperity. He was sincerely rejoiced to believe that Walter Warton must be, after all, a good husband.

After all? Yes, after all the vague, deep, long-abiding suspicions of Warton which had brooded in Lennon's mind, which had made him think that some time or other Mabel would have need of friendly counsel and a true helping hand, even though offered as the generous revenge of a disinterested discarded lover. He rejoiced to think just now that his suspicions must have been idle; and it must be said that his joy over the thought of her husband's worthiness was all the more thorough and deep because he loved her now no longer—and wondered how it was he ever could have loved her, could have dreamed and hoped and raved and despaired and tried to fling his life away, for that dear, good-natured, honest matron who stood and smiled before him so sweet and friendly and uninteresting.

As he returned to London that day, he boldly faced his own thoughts. He lighted a lamp mentally, and went down into the sepulchre, and opened the coffin and looked at the long-embalmed dead. He brought forth his old love in his arms, and studied, passionless, its fading lineaments. Yes, he was once wildly, madly in love with Mabel Ethelstone's soft brown eyes and her sweet voice and her white hand; in love with her gentleness, which he took for intellectual serenity; in love with her easy composure, which he mistook for noble self-subduing independence of soul; in love with her very scruples, and most in love of all with her tender, firm rejection of himself, and her complete devotion to another. For her at one time he was ambitious, and would have risked life gladly; he would have thought it sweet to die if her eyes but moistened with a loving farewell. For her he had done more than that: he had lived—lived in the manly devoted hope that some time when sorrow threatened her, it might be his happy, unselfish, unrewarded lot to stand by her side and help to shield her. And now he found her a good-hearted, gentle, prosaic woman, whose very qualities of plain and homely goodness were a febrifuge and antidote to love. Nay, more than that, he saw that she really had not changed, except in matronly proportions; that she must have been always much the same; and that the Ralph Lennon of twenty fell in love, not with her at all, but with the radiant image of his own youth and fervour and vain romance

and hopeless longing, as he saw it mirrored in the well of her deep-brown eyes.

Walter Warton accompanied him to the railway station. Ralph, of course, had made many promises to return soon and see Mabel, and tell little Watty more about lions, and inspect the drawing of Antigone and Œdipus.

"I often go up northward," said Warton, as they walked along the road together; "indeed some of my strongholds are in the north, although I have not the devotion to Lancashire which I used to have once. I know many people near Waterdale; I have been at Lowther Castle and Patterdale Hall, and—and other places. Now I shall have a fresh impulse to go there, in wishing to see you. I'll look you up there, soon enough; depend on it."

"You cannot come too soon, if you are not particular about accommodation. The house is sadly out of repair, and I have not had anything done to it; and indeed don't mean to."

"Of course not. Why should you? You'll never live there very long, I should think."

"Well, I don't know; I sometimes think of living there altogether."

"There, down in Cumberland; buried alive in a mountain-pass?"

"Yes; why not? Perhaps I should be buried alive wherever I go."

"Not you; you are quite certain to find existence there unendurable after a while; you will have to come out into the living world—the active, the real world, the only world worth living in or for."

"Where is that?" asked Lennon, smiling.

"The world of London; the only stage worth playing on, the only audience worth playing to. You used to think so once."

"So I used; but I have seen other worlds since, and found life much the same in them. You have no idea how insignificant London looks from an Australian bush."

"Yet it is the centre of life—Anglo-Saxon life, at least."

"Perhaps so. But the sun looks very little just now up there; and the great central sun we can't see at all. To you who are in it and of it, London looks all-important—and it is all-important. But I am practically so far away from it that

I concern myself little more about it than that old woman shaking the carpet yonder does about the sun."

"Ah, you think so now, but your feelings will soon change ; and I look to see you deserting Cumberland and settling in London, and probably plunging into politics, or literature, or railway speculation, or something of the kind, before long. Meanwhile, I shall make good haste to come and spend a few days with you in your mountain home, before your recluse fit is over. May I come soon?"

"As soon as ever you please, if, as I said, you don't mind bad accommodation. You shall be welcome whenever you come. I wish you could bring that fine little boy with you ; but I doubt whether old Mrs. Beck, my housekeeper, would be quite prepared to arrange for *him*."

"In any case, my dear fellow, his mamma would never consent to let him out of her sight. Nor his cousin, indeed. A noble-hearted girl that, Lennon ; and a girl of spirit and talent. But for her to help us, and commune with us, and keep us alive with her vivacity, her good sense, and her affection, we should be sometimes sore pressed by the world's vexations. Lennon, why have not *you* a home?"

"Of what use is it to have a home, if a man must always be absent from it?" Lennon thought. But he made no reply to the question ; and Warton, perhaps thinking it rather unlucky, forbore to press it.

"Then I'll come to see you very soon," he continued. "You live near the Alwyns, I think?"

"Yes—that is, not very far from them. The lake lies between."

"I used to meet the Alwyns a good deal in London not long ago—shortly after they were married. What do you think of them—of him?"

"I only met him two or three times, but I liked him very much. I thought him a fine, manly, upright, intelligent specimen of an English clergyman."

"Exactly ; so do I. People say he's a little, just a little lax—very Broad Church ; but I don't know ; I daresay it's all nonsense. And his wife—is she not a charming creature?"

"Yes, indeed ; a bright genial little woman. I do not know much of her."

"Ah, you will come to know her when you live near. She is delightful. I wonder how she ever came to marry a man so

much older than herself. He might be her father. *She* is very strict in her religious views—decidedly Evangelical; and I fancy she guides him of late into more rigid ways of thought than he is naturally inclined to.”

“He struck me as being a liberal and sensible man,” said Lennon. “I had no opportunity of observing anything of her views; and, to speak the truth, all these hair-splitting differences of sect fail to interest me.”

“But you have renounced, no doubt, the old extravagances of thought? I suppose they are only a phase of mind we must all pass through.”

“Perhaps.” And that topic fell lifeless—still-born, in fact.

They reached the station in a few minutes, and Lennon got into the up-train. Warton spoke a few very friendly words at parting; and Lennon, internally angry at a coldness of manner he could hardly get over, did his best to be equally genial.

Warton asked a porter a question or two about some later trains, and then walked slowly home.

Mabel came to meet him, joy shining on her face.

“Dear Walter, how glad I am you have come back! I am sorry good old Ralph had to go so soon; but it is so kind of you to come quickly back. Is he not changed, dear old Ralph?”

“Yes, very much changed, indeed. Can you put me up a few things, Mabel? I am going in an hour—by the 2.45.”

“Going, dearest? Going already, my Walter?”

“Yes, love. Didn’t I tell you? Yes, I am going to Leicester. I am pledged to attend a meeting there—I can’t get off.”

“O, what a sad disappointment! And when do you return?”

“The day after to-morrow, I think.”

He preceded her into the house. She followed him, tamely and sadly. He saw Miss Ethelstone in one of the rooms, and called to her:

“Well, Gracie dear, how do you like our old friend, Ralph Lennon?”

“Very much, indeed—for what I saw of him. He seems manly and straightforward; I like *that*.”

“Then, on the whole, you like him?”

“Decidedly—yes.”

“I am very glad to hear it.” And he passed on without

saying any more ; and his faithful wife, dejected, went to make preparations to expedite the journey which was such a disappointment to her.

CHAPTER X.

TOM BERRY LEAVING HOME.

IN the neighbourhood of Bethlehem and of the Surrey Theatre, on the south side of the Thames, are, as everybody knows, a great many narrow streets of dingy and decaying houses where the poor herd and huddle until some new railway line invades them, bombards them, and drives them out. When we bombarded Kagosima, practical politicians here, who do not understand your sentimental nonsense, said it did not matter much because the houses were only trumpery wooden affairs, and the people who lived there had nothing to do but just to pack up their traps when they found the home blazing about their ears, and set to work at making a new home somewhere else. The same sort of philosophy reconciles some of us to the railway bombardments which every now and then rattle down some acres of little streets on this or that side of the Thames. The houses were so wretched and rickety that it really *can't* matter to these people whether they are knocked down or not. But even this soothing philosophy does not apply to every instance. There are some neat, humble, bright homes even amid that vast acreage of dirt and disease. Somebody's energy and intelligence convert a squalid den here and there into a genuine home, tasteful in its paint, its neatness, its birdcage, its box of mignonette ; a sort of place which might, one would think, have its household gods, and be glad with family love. Such a little home has to come down too. The genial memories that haunt it cannot guard it, as the Latin poet pictured the memories of Hannibal's triumphs guarding, like spirit-sentinels, the safety of the hero's life. Perhaps if somebody were to paint for us the last night in such an old home it might not be in its way less interesting than the pre-Raphaelite picture we all admired a few years ago—the picture of the dissolute, reckless, and broken squire inviting, in the presence of his sad wife, his boy-heir to pledge

him to the memories of the hall they have to leave to-morrow.

Tom Berry of Southwark was about to be evicted from one of those rare homes which may be found even amid the dirt and poverty of the neighbourhood. An energetic, independent fellow, he always wanted, when he married, to have a house of his own, and hated the idea of living in lodgings, where the man over your head might be a drunkard who beat his wife, and the young person who occupied the back-parlour might have odd ways of staying out at night; where your fellow-lodgers jibed at you if you declined to consort with them and fall into their ways; and where, if you did consort with them, some of them were sure to dun you to become security for rent, or to lend them a pound until they got that new situation which was always just within their reach. So when Tom Berry married he took a small house, then almost new, and he paid twenty-two pounds a-year for it; and he became, in due time of occupation, a registered voter for the borough of Southwark. He was a carpenter by profession, and a handy man in many ways; and he could adorn his house with the workmanship of his own fingers—clever to handle a paint-brush or a trowel as well as a saw. He was a man superior to his class in many qualities, and he married an intelligent young woman; and in the first years of his married life he had great plans for the education of his children—a work more difficult to accomplish out of weekly wages twenty years ago than it is now. One idea of his was a grand local coöperation plan—so many families in the neighbourhood to combine, and hire, all to themselves, the whole services of two really good instructors—one for the boys, one for the girls; the instruction to come off in each of the houses successively: and thus the father and mother to have a dash of the benefit. But the plan never came to anything. It haunted his mind, for the first two or three years, as a thing that must soon be matured: then he and his wife began to shake their heads at each other; then they grew hopeful; then the hope faded; at last it went out all together, and Tom Berry and his wife made up their minds that they were to have no children. Such a fate cannot be without producing some direct effect on the relations of a married pair to each other. Either it sours and perverts them—the one mentally holding the other responsible; or it makes them more loving and tender than ever, they knowing that

they are to stand side by side alone in the world so long as destiny allows them to stand together. Tom Berry and his wife were thus affected, and they loved each other deeply, and he cleaved to her, sometimes deserting even politics for her, and letting an unjust, aristocratic, and Tory world go by undenounced for weeks together for her sake; and she clung to him, until the time came when she must relax her hold and be gone.

When Tom Berry first learned that he must quit his house, it was a great vexation to him; and he chafed at it, and probably connected the decree in some way with the domination of an aristocratic faction, half Whig, half Tory, and wholly opposed to manhood suffrage. But there was plenty of time to find a new home, and make every preparation to go there; and Tom was not a fellow to maunder and grumble and do nothing. Only something happened which much distracted his attention. His wife became liable to severe attacks of illness and faintness, and the doctor talked of some mysterious and dangerous organic disease. Tom thought no more of preparation to remove. He remained at home altogether, except for his work, and watched her. Then she got better—much better, and appeared likely to do well. It was during this interval that, moved by some question of the rights of his class, Tom went to the meeting where Ralph Lennon saw him. But the rallying was all a delusion. His wife suddenly fell off, grew alarmingly worse and worse. One gray mournful evening she sat upright in bed, looked wildly at her husband, faintly cried “O, poor Tom!” threw her arms round his neck, fell back, and died.

So Tom Berry was left to set about the task of finding a new home alone. The time was near at hand; but it did not make any matter now where he went.

He was sitting by the bed whereon lay the dead body of his wife. His elbows rested on his outspread knees; his clasped hands hung down, his head was bent, and he was staring at the floor; at least his eyes were turned thither, but he saw nothing there. Sad beautiful pictures passed before his eyes, filling his soul with the anguish of despair. He saw a bright lad and a winsome lass having their happy Sunday stroll and love-making along the soft uplands of Sydenham (where then no palace stood), and over smiling Blackheath, and across picturesque daisy-covered Wimbledon, and where the Thames—there a

stream of silver—winds among the foliage of Kew. He saw a happy young married pair—busy, helpful, hopeful, loving—looking earnestly out for the baby that never came, and then clinging to each other all the closer for the disappointment. He saw many a time of trial,—when employment failed, when wages were low, when there was a strike, and he, furious for the rights of his class, took high part in it ; and the cupboard was sometimes empty, and the Sunday clothes at last disappeared. He saw, through whatever trial, a loving hopeful face turned to his own. Now how sweet even the sorrow seemed ! how trifling and short the intervals of trial ! As he looked in a little glass that stood upon the table, he saw a haggard grizzled face and bald temples ; and turning away from that sight his eyes rested on the white lank cheeks of a dead woman. Strange, he could look almost stoically on that corpse ; it hardly reminded him of his wife. But there hung behind the door a frayed and faded old gown ; and that, or the stuff that made it, he bought himself—only the other day it seemed, and yet it was before they had any suspicion of what was to happen—and he brought it home to her, and she made it and trimmed it herself ; and she wore it on the Sunday, and they went to Sydenham—the old Sydenham, but how changed ! And he felt so proud of her appearance, and told her she was looking younger and better than ever. So when he saw this poor old empty gown—this ghost of a garment—he knew it, and he remembered all ; and with a great burst of agony he succumbed to the reality of his position, and sobbed aloud.

Some kindly women looked after the house for him in turns. The one who was now on duty—a decent old Irish woman—heard a knock at the street-door, and opened it.

A gentleman asked for Mr. Berry.

“Sure, his wife’s dead !” was her reply ; as if that ought to settle the matter, death postponing all business—an Irish, not an English, sentiment.

The gentleman said he knew that—he had heard of the death—and came not for business, but as a friend. If Mr. Berry did not like to see him just then, he would come another time.

The woman went upstairs to Berry.

“Tom, alanna ! there’s a strange gentleman wants to see you. He’s a friend, he says. Go an’ talk to him, Tom ; ’twill do you good.”

"What does he say he wants?"

"He doesn't want anything, Tom, dear. He says he's a friend, and come to talk to you. He looks a rare gentleman."

"He can't be a friend of mine. I haven't any swell friends."

"Well, niver mind. He says he's a friend, anyhow. Come down and talk to him, alanna; 'twill do you good; 'twill rouse you up a bit."

Tom mechanically rose and came downstairs.

In the little passage stood the gentleman, and Tom knew him at once as the stranger whom he had conducted to Wat Warton's chambers in the Temple.

"Come in, sir," said he heavily and listlessly; and he led the way into a little parlour, neatly kept and adorned with some of the coloured Christmas prints from the *Illustrated London News*, and two or three photographs, at the sight of one of which a great spasm passed over Tom's face.

"I didn't come to disturb you," said Lennon; "and in fact I came to you for nothing but just to see and speak with you, and tell you how sorry I was to hear of your trouble. I went to the rooms yonder where I met you first, to inquire after you, and they told me what had happened; and then I thought perhaps you would not object to my coming to see you, that we might exchange a friendly word or two."

"Thank you, sir; you're very kind, I'm sure; and I'm glad to see you. Of course I knew you at once. It's—it's a great grief, this. We were always very happy. We never quarrelled, sir, never; though there's many a woman couldn't have done with some of my ways. It's hard to have to begin life all over again, at my time—and alone."

"Yes, it is a great grief; and I am not going to offer you any commonplaces of condolence."

"No, it wouldn't be any use," said Tom, shaking his head decisively.

"It wouldn't. Such words either have no effect at all, or they are unnecessary. If a man could be comforted by anything of the kind, his grief is not very deep—as yours is."

"Quite right, sir; that's quite right. Are you married?"

"No."

"Never have been?"

"Never; and never am likely to be."

"Ah, then, you can't know what my loss is ; but I'm much obliged to you for thinking about it."

"Well, I came to see you partly with a kind of idea that you might like to leave London for a little, and go to the North—not to-day or to-morrow, of course ; but in a few days, after—" Lennon stopped. He had not the courage to say "after the funeral." Berry made a sign with his hand to signify that he understood.

"The fact is," Lennon pursued, beginning to see his way clearer, "I am about to be very busy down there. I want some little building and carpentering work done—not great architectural work by any means, but some school-houses, and an improved kind of cottage, and all that ; and I want the help of some one who, being a skilful and practical workman, could give my ideas something like shape. Now, I think you are the very man who could help me—at least, I should like you to come down and talk the matter over with me. Will you come?"

"It's very kind of you."

Then Tom stopped and began to think. His home was gone, in every sense. He must soon remove somewhere, and London would be hideous to him. It was something of a hope awakened within him to think of seeing the fresh country, with hills and river.

"It's very kind of you," he repeated ; "and I shall soon be glad to go anywhere out of this. I'll go, but only on one condition, firm and fast, as a man."

"What is it, Mr. Berry ? Anything you like."

"That you don't let me do nothing for something—that it's a business affair, though all kindness, I know, on your part ; and that I'm allowed to give full value for every shilling I get."

"Certainly ; I should never have thought of hinting any other condition."

"Then I'll go," said Tom. "I liked you from the first, and I'm glad to go anywhere with you."

So it was soon settled that Tom Berry was to go to the North, and take up his quarters for a little time—or a long time, as the case might be—with Ralph Lennon ; at least, in Lennon's neighbourhood. Lennon had a keen natural shrewdness about him, by which he penetrated at once the depths of Tom's simple, earnest nature. Perhaps it was less a quick and

correct appreciation of character that guided him than a mere instinct. Himself earnest, unpretending, and manly even in his eccentricity, he read the heart of the Southwark carpenter by the light of his own nature. He quite understood, then, that just at such a time the one only way to divert Berry's mind from personal grief was to draw him into talk about a scheme which proposed to do good to others. So he expounded to Berry his ideas about innovation and improvement down in Cumberland, and Tom grew enthusiastic over the scheme. It was quite new to him to meet with any one who had a fresh faith in any irregular way of doing good. The working men of England—at least, of London—have become terrible sceptics of late. They have seen so many shams come up, and so many hopeful, alluring dreams fade away, that the mere suggestion of any plan of improvement, political or social, seems only made to be laughed at. Most of the philanthropic teaching of England, directed lately at the working classes, has simply gone to tell them that it is their duty to keep quiet, mind their business, stay away from the public-house, avoid politics, and disbelieve in schemes of Reform. Tom Berry's own class had imbibed the teaching, and chaffed him for his nonsense about Chartism and the rights of Labour. As the black nigger uses the words "black nigger" for terms of reproach, so the British working man sometimes holds it up as a reproach to his brother that he has a working man's natural notions, and hopes, and dreams. Tom was delighted to meet some one at last who had a flavour of the old freshness about him—delightful and fascinating as a memory of some of the follies of youth.

As they talked over many things, a twinkle at last came into Tom's eye.

"And did you see Wat Warton that night?" he asked.

"No," answered Lennon, "not that night; but the next day, and several times since."

"Well, and what did you think of him? *He's* not much changed. You'd have no trouble in recognising him."

"No; he looks just the same as ever—quite young and fresh."

"Ah! so he does. Would you think that he's nigh as old as me—ay, maybe as old all out? Well, he's not had the same trouble. No, nor he couldn't have."

"No; his life seems to have been very successful."

"Successful? I don't know that. He has talents, you know. I don't believe in him now; but I know he has talents."

"Yes; I always knew that."

"Well, and what has he brought his talents to? What have they done for him? He's only made himself a poor hack. Let him hang on to the Tories, and see what they'll do for him! He's hard up, I believe, poor fellow; and I'm sorry for that. I don't like a fellow to be hard up, whatever he is. But he's never suffered. He couldn't suffer."

"Why not?" asked Lennon—not out of curiosity, but only to say something which might allow Tom to go on talking.

"Because he hasn't the heart to suffer, sir; because he never felt for any human being but himself; because, when Fortune's attacking him, she's only beating the wind, so long as he leaves his own carcass alone. Touch him there, and he's quick all over! Turn him one way, and he's got the hide of a rhinoceros; turn him the other way, and he's like a skinned eel."

"You seem to have a strong dislike to him; and I think you look at him unfairly."

"Not a bit of it, sir. Don't you trust him. Mark my words: I know Mr. Walter Warton now; I didn't once. I believed him; and I don't know whether I mightn't say I loved him; but he showed himself gradually to me, bit by bit, and I saw him as he was—the slippery selfish humbug. Don't you ever trust him, Mr. Lennon; he'd deceive any man if he could, or any woman."

Tom was growing excited. Lennon made an effort to turn the conversation another way. He did not care to sit and hear his old friend denounced; and he did not want to argue that or any other point with a man in Tom Berry's present mood of mind. But Tom kept on.

"He's going to stand for a place up in the North soon, I'm told. Some of the working men there wrote to us here about it. I gave them my opinion. The Tories are bringing him out. The Carlton is doing the whole thing; and I hear it's his last chance. They think it would be a good thing for them to be able to show 'the orator of the people,' as Wat used to call himself, on their side."

"Is he likely to get in?"

"Well, I don't know that he wouldn't have a good chance,

too, with the Carlton's tin, and one or two big local men to bring him out ; but if the working chaps are true to each other there, they can do a deal. It's a place where some of the old franchises are left ; and most of 'em have votes that way—what working man has a ten-pound house in a country-town ?—and they all have voices and throats ; and I'll put them up to something, I know, that'll fix him, or I'm mistaken. Warton's easily frightened ; I know that. He hasn't the pluck of a schoolgirl."

"I see we are likely to be on opposite sides, Mr. Berry, if politics should break in upon us down at the North. Unless he really comes out a tremendous and unmitigated Tory, I shall feel bound to support my old acquaintance."

"Well, sir, we can't help it. We must only differ. I'll do my best to forward your building work all the same ; perhaps it's the work I'm best fitted for, and ought to have stuck to. And if the thing only gives you time, and does not come on too soon, I've good hope that you'll have seen into Wat Warton before he gets on an election platform again."

After a little conversation Lennon left poor Berry to his lonely house—a home no longer. It was arranged that Berry should come northward as soon as he could.

"God bless yer honer !" said the old Irishwoman, as she hurried to open the door for Lennon ; "you've brightened him up wondherful wid talkin' to him, and lettin' him hear himself talk. Poor Tom ! Och, yeh, 'twas *she* that knew that ; and whin anything was the matther wid him, she'd always help him to talk himself out of it."

Lennon did not pay much attention to Berry's denunciation of Warton. It seemed to him to represent naturally enough the fanatical honesty of the Chartist's indignation against a man who, for any reason, good or bad, wise or unwise, had forsworn one tittle of the ancient creed and sacraments. Probably Warton had, in the fair development of political intellect, outgrown the old husk of his early opinions ; and the man whom you have left behind in political sentiments is no more likely to judge you fairly than the old friend who still trudges to business afoot, while you drive in a carriage to the splendid offices of your new limited-liability company, or canter to Downing-street with your groom at your tail. Lennon took quite the old Irishwoman's views of the matter, and was glad to have been the means of helping Berry to talk

himself, even for a few moments, out of the iron gripe of his affliction.

The iron gripe closed again round Tom's heart when he was left alone. But he had some work to do ; and he turned to and went on with it. He was engaged in making a coffin for his wife. No hand but his, he was resolved, should construct this her last tenement. The best oak he could get was brought under his saw and his plane ; he had bought black velvet to cover all, and solemn bronze clasps and nails and plates to be its dismal ornaments ; and he sawed and planed, and made smooth and symmetrical, fitted in here, rubbed off there, and toiled with a nervous and morbid exactness, as if the dead could be conscious of the anxious presence of his loving hand. He felt a grim and ghastly pride in making the incasing worthy of her he was to lay there—to lay there with his own hands. The jeweller, working with fond attentive eye to make some chain or ornament worthy to lie on the bosom of his love, could not have been more eagerly absorbed in the finish and perfection of his task than the poor Southwark carpenter labouring at the coffin of his wife.

No hand but his should lay her in the coffin ; nay, no hand should touch her but his alone. He peremptorily, and even fiercely, rejected the urgent entreaties of some of the women round him to be allowed to wash and lay out, after the proprieties of their drear routine, the body which still held his living heart. He would have no old crones meddling with those lifeless limbs, and profaning with useless touch the sacred stillness of that form. He would have no ghastly and hideous shroud, no grim funereal corpse-gloves ; none of the conventional paraphernalia wherewith the vulgar think it religion to bedizen the dead. She should lie as she lay now,—just as she used to lie down to sleep of nights ; only a few old things that he had specially given her—an ornament or two, a buckle, her combs, waist-belts, and such like—laid with her in her coffin, that the presence of some mute memorials of his love might follow her into the central darkness of the grave.

“I never saw such work,” said his old Irish assistant and consoler ; “it's haythenish ; it's worse than the Turks. It's mad he is wid the grief, poor fellow, or he wouldn't be going on in such a way. Fancy a dacent woman put in her grave widout washing or laying out, or a taste of a shroud about her ! God help us, Mary Berry ! but it's you would be surprised if

you was to wake up and see the state ye're in. And all out of his love, God help him ! Well, it's a quare place is London ; but sure it's aisy seen they're not Christians at all, and they knows no betther ! God be wid poor ould Ireland, where they bury the dead dacent, whatever happens to the living ! ”

So at last the whole work got done ; and Tom had his way, and laid his wife in the coffin he had made ; and then in the earth of the suburban churchyard. He came back and took a farewell of his lonely house, sold his few poor sticks of furniture, and gave away some trifles of clothing here and there to the women who had been kind to him. The walls of the churchyard seemed now to enclose his whole married life. Wife and home and all were there. He was poor as he began, alone as he began. All that was left to him after so many years of hope, struggle, happiness, and sorrow, was a memory, a faded old neck-ribbon, and a lock of hair.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ALWYNS.

“ I HAVE heard something of our new neighbour, dear—Mr. Lennon.”

“ Indeed, Myra ! What of him ? I was thinking of him not many minutes ago.”

Dr. Alwyn put away his paper, and waited to hear what his pretty wife had to say.

They had been home only a day or two, but Myra had been already half over the parish, making up by wonderful increase of energy for time snatched from duty for travel and pleasure. Mrs. Alwyn was not a Cumberland woman ; she came, indeed, from the far south-west, and had the pleasant, soft accent of the South, free from the homely, harsh burr of the northern counties. When her marriage brought her to settle in Waterdale, she rushed with a fresh confident energy at the full discharge of all the duties there which she considered proper to her new station. They have, or had, in Australia a phrase to describe a certain frame of mind into which persons who had anything of an organizing tendency habitually fell on arriving in the colony. The phrase was “ new-chummism.” The new chum

came in with the conviction that he was in possession of a perfect plan for setting everything to rights. He went with splendid confidence at the reformation of all things, big and little. Older settlers smiled, and knew how it would end. It did end just so. The new chum found that, let him do his best, things went pretty much as before ; unless when, in some small instances, the desperate vigour of his interference succeeded in making them go a little worse. The *vis inertiae* which met him on every side would have been enough of itself to baffle his best exertions, to say nothing of the fierce and tremendous energy of positive antagonism which he had not uncommonly to encounter. The new chum gradually relaxed his hand from the plough in so stubborn a soil ; presently he became an old chum like the rest, and was ready to smile over the virgin vigour of the next fresh importation from the motherland across the ocean. Mrs. Alwyn came into Waterdale filled with the spirit of new-chummism. She resolved to put everything to rights, and to restore the warped order of things all around. The wives of the few wealthy people who lived there did nothing ; had no taste for doing good ; neglected the poor, except so far as the occasional giving of indiscriminate charity was concerned ; shrank with ladylike horror from all the un-virtuous ; and did nothing for religion except to order their carriages on a fine Sunday and go to church. Even this sacred duty was performed only about half the year, on an average ; for the ladies seized every possible excuse for hurrying themselves and their husbands out of the place whenever they could—to Windermere, to Scarborough, to London, to Brighton, to Paris—anywhere. Among the poor, dirt, ignorance, heedlessness of religion, absence from church, drink, small-pox, and various other scourges and sins, prevailed. Mrs. Alwyn, who naturally delighted in painting, music, fine clothes, and luxury, girt up her loins, nevertheless, and went in for sanitary, moral, and religious reform. Her husband smiled now and then, but none the less admired and encouraged. He was an old chum, and was not, perhaps, too sanguine ; but he did his best to stimulate and to help. Personally, he had long been deeply absorbed in the writing of a book on the flowers, plants, and ferns of the neighbourhood. It was his delight—he had been years over it ; and he read each new page of it to his wife. It was always with a suppressed sigh that he laid it aside at the call of duty ; but he did put it aside, and he never grumbled.

Moreover, since his marriage and the importation of his wife, the calls of duty had begun marvellously to increase. For Mrs. Alwyn was teaching everybody to regard her husband and herself as their spiritual, moral, and social instructors and helpers in every conceivable difficulty relating to the next world or to this. The result was that the duty of advising, consulting, consoling, scolding, and assisting began to make calls on Dr. Alwyn's time every other moment in the day, and the work on flowers and ferns had to be incessantly put away. Sometimes Alwyn doubted whether it would ever be finished ; but while he sighed he consoled himself with the thought that man has duties on earth which must sometimes take precedence of book-writing, and that the world could do without his work on flowers.

"Yes, I have heard of him," Mrs. Alwyn went on. "He has been here. He stayed a few days, and then went back to London. He is coming back again—when, I don't know, and I believe nobody does. I am inclined to think he sets up for being eccentric ; and I am sorry. I don't like people setting up for anything. *That* is not the proper motive. He is going to live all alone in that dreadful old house across the lake—at the mouth of that pass ; and they tell me he is not going to have a single thing done to put it in repair, although he is said to be very rich."

"Who told you all this, Myra ?"

"Old Mrs. Beck, his housekeeper, or servant, or nurse, or whatever she is ! a good old woman, I think ; much troubled in body by rheumatism, and in mind by the eccentricities which she fears her master means to display. She came to me in sore perplexity because Mr. Lennon told her, when he went to London, that he might perhaps bring somebody back with him, but that she need not make any preparation, and must not alter anything in the rooms ; and she wanted to know whether I did not think she might indulge in a little pious fraud, and set everything to rights without his knowing it."

"What did you advise her to do, dear ?"

"Well, of course I told her to do exactly as she had been ordered, and not for anything on earth to put herself in the way of having to deceive. These people, Alwyn, think nothing of a lie. It's quite dreadful. They call us a truth-telling people. I suppose we are, when we are taught rightly and brought up well ; but I am sure the poor creatures I meet here—and down

in Devonshire too—think nothing of any number of lies. Who was it that said, the other day, the English lower classes were habitual liars? Carlyle, was it not?”

“No, dear; it was Mill.”

“Yes, so it was. I am sure I quite agree with him.”

“Well, he did not put it exactly in that naked, unqualified kind of way; and then he said there was this good thing about them,—that they were ashamed of lying.”

“Then there I don’t agree with him. They seem to me to take it quite as a matter of course, and never to be ashamed of it—women and girls especially. There is a girl up there, Bessie Raynes—you know her, dear; she attended my Bible-class and helped to teach my sewing-class; and I was quite fond of her—a clever, pretty girl, and motherless too. Now she has been deceiving me.”

Mrs. Alwyn spoke very seriously and sadly, and put her hand under her chin and remained silent for a moment.

“How has she been deceiving you, Myra?”

“Well, I thought she was acting rather foolishly; and before we went abroad I spoke to her very earnestly, and made her promise that she would be more careful, and keep more to herself—and she with no mother, poor thing!—and she did promise. And yesterday, when I saw her, she told me she had kept her promise; and now I find that she didn’t, and that she has been deceiving me; and I am so sorry, and so much afraid, and——”

Myra coloured and beat the table a little with her hand, and broke down in her explanation. She was only a young wife, and in parochial work a young practitioner, and hesitated about expressing her suspicions.

“But who told you, my dear, that the girl had not kept her word to you?”

“It was old Mrs. Beck. She’s an aunt or something of Bessie’s; and it was partly about that that she came to me. I am afraid I was rather angry, and said some sharp things to the poor old creature; because, when she talked about deceiving Mr. Lennon, I told her that was the kind of teaching she gave her niece, and it was that made girls liars, and left them with no care for goodness at all.”

“I think, Myra, dear, you had better see the girl yourself, and talk to her. Old people—ignorant people especially—are very apt to bear harshly on the young, and to misconstrue any

foolish word or act of thoughtlessness. See the girl yourself, and talk to her—kindly, you know, very kindly. She always seemed to me a very good girl, and truthful; and I don't think she would deceive you—I don't think she would do anything wrong."

"Ah, my dear, dear Alwyn,"—she went up to him and put her arms round his neck, in which embrace he looked naturally very happy,—“how little you know of the vanity of girls and women—of all of us, even the best, my dear! I suppose you never were vain of anything, or cared what anybody thought of you, or proud of anything, except perhaps of being a gentleman, and doing what was right."

"O, yes, I have been proud of something—very proud, too."

"Of what, for instance?"

"Well, of my wife, dear."

"Come, that's said to comfort me now; and I am very glad, because I am rather put out. But I'll take your advice about Bessie Raynes. I'll speak to her; indeed I meant to speak to her in any case. But I fear that only for your admonition I might have talked to her rather sharply all at once, and without giving her any time to speak for herself. And now, dear, are you ready for breakfast?"

The Alwys were of course early risers: people in Cumberland are. Myra sometimes had scoured the country round on a pony, without the attendance of groom or squire, before breakfast. One of the eccentricities which she had heard of as likely to develop themselves in Ralph Lennon's character was a tendency to sit up reading half the night, and sleep until ten or eleven in the morning. She did not like these ways. She thought she could never like Lennon as a neighbour or friend. She began to wish he had remained in Australia.

People who profess to be very wise in the ways of women say that a married lady's husband has no reason to feel glad when the married lady begins to dislike a man, and says so. She may be perfectly sincere in her dislike, observe these sav'es or cynics; but it is not an encouraging omen that her mind has dwelt on him long enough and distinctly enough to dislike him. Certainly Myra was preparing to dislike Ralph Lennon already.

But that did not trouble her much, or occupy much of her mind at present. She had just now a little trouble of a quite

different kind. It is so hard even when one acts for the very best to make things always go right in this best of all possible worlds. Candide, we know, gave up the task altogether, and stuck to cultivating his garden, as under all the circumstances the best thing he could do. There at least he was safe from doing any harm. You sow your seeds, and if you know anything about the matter, or take any rational care, you may count on certain results. The fig-tree, at all events, will not begin perplexing and alarming you by shooting out thistles ; if your hen intimates that she is about to lay an egg, you have no fear that she will contribute a scorpion for your breakfast. But in trying to keep the human garden in order, especially if it be a little outside the range of one's own household wall, odd, fantastic, and grim results are of deplorably common occurrence. You are constantly sowing what in your heart you believe good seed, and seeing only tares come up. You pluck away what seems a decayed dead weed, and lo, the shriek of the mandrake thrills your nerves. The acorn sends up a sickly poppy ; the bread-fruit is a poison-plant.

Mrs. Alwyn was too energetic, unselfish, and healthy a woman to keep herself wholly to the cultivation of her own little domestic life-garden. She went about doing good—at all events trying to do good ; often vexed by disappointment, always somewhat impatient of results, but never for long discouraged. Now, one of the things she did was to found all manner of classes, and have evenings of teachings and lectures ; and, smitten by the example of Mr. Maurice and Mr. Hughes and other good men in London, to bring men and women of her own rank, when she could, in contact with the humbler, to lecture to them and teach them. But Mrs. Alwyn strongly repudiated anything unsectarian. She went in resolutely for religion—her own religion—and could see little good in anything else, as indeed not many women can. Now one of her favourites, alike as pupil and as helper in the teaching, was the Bessie Raynes just spoken of, a pretty intelligent girl, left to the care, if one may use that word, of a rather dissolute father, who was a shoemaker, and who swore nearly as much as his brother craftsman, the owner of the parrot in our friend Robert Buchanan's poem. And the classes and lectures had brought Bessie Raynes into the notice of a rather thoughtless young fellow, a son of a landowner of the place, who once lectured on something or other at Mrs. Alwyn's express re-

quest ; and he went too often into the town afterwards ; and he sent Bessie presents of game he had shot ; and he had been seen walking with her ; and people talked : nothing more, so far. Mrs. Alwyn advised her earnestly to avoid such company ; and the girl faithfully promised that she would : and now Myra had heard that the promise was broken. Even the gossips did not hint any more as yet ; but it troubled Myra sorely. She was grieved and angry over the deceit, and fearful of worse to come. So was her husband, though he said nothing of his fear to her ; and he resolved at once to make some effort at interference. This sort of thing, of course, is a story of every day in the experience of a country clergyman. Some men get used to it, and take it coolly, believing that bell, book, and candle cannot avert it. Dr. Alwyn never got used to anything that was bad ; never believed that bad was inevitable.

Breakfast over, Dr. Alwyn made ready for a walk into the town, and through the parish generally. He cast only one longing look at his unfinished MS. volume—which, indeed, he had not dreamed of taking in hand just that day. Too soon—much too soon. He had had several weeks of mere enjoyment, pure enjoyment ; and now work must set in. The holiday was over, and school was to begin again. People would expect to be called upon by Dr. Alwyn and his wife : not great people—they were few, and Alwyn would have made little account of putting off ceremonial visits to them—but people to whom the friendly call of the rector and his wife is always a matter of pride, if made—of grief and vexation, if omitted. Now Dr. Alwyn, not attaching much importance to social conventionalities himself, was quite ready to defer with the utmost humility to the feelings of others on that score, when those others happened either to be poorer than him, or his inferiors in rank. So he told his wife what they must do, and he bade her get ready to accompany him.

This was a part of her duties which Myra did not enjoy. She went through it, but she never threw herself into it heart and soul, as into other branches of the parochial business. Dr. Alwyn sometimes smiled at her reluctance, and told her laughingly that he quite saw through it, and that the less she liked the duty the greater her credit in doing it. Myra really delighted to do good ; but she was not sorry if the doing good combined with it a little pleasant exercise of patronage and authority. It is easy, it is bracing, it is self-satisfying, to help

and counsel and teach the poor. There is a sense of devotedness about it, and sometimes a sense of self-sacrifice, which have a positive fascination for a generous nature. To enter the hovel or the garret where small-pox or fever cowers has often as inspiring an excitement in it to a brave energetic woman, as to climb one of the peaks of Monte Rosa or to explore a new country has for a man; and the woman has the sweet additional joy of believing that she is doing some good, alleviating some pang. In all such dealing with the poor—the suffering poor, and even the sinful poor—there is a certain dash of the picturesque, the romantic, the strange. Myra was an artist; and the situations into which she plunged herself when she visited the sick, or tried to check the course of the falling; had almost always something which discovered an affinity for the artistic nature. Death is always sublime. Sin is seldom quite uninteresting. But the visits, the mere visits, to people whom you did not come to console, whom you dared not counsel; who did not appear to have any sorrows or temptations; who were not in any sense your equals, but must in every way be treated carefully and elaborately as if they were; who were utterly commonplace and colourless—that was the labour, there was the trial! What on earth did Myra care about Mrs. Roper, the brewer's wife; and what could Mrs. Roper want of seeing her? Mrs. Roper was not poor; she was sufficiently well off, and she put on a broad imitation of style in everything she did, while her conversation was utterly stupid, and she had not half an idea in her head. What possible object was gained by speaking twenty minutes with Jessy and Julia White, the saddler's daughters, two vapid gooselike girls, whose only idea while Mrs. Alwyn was present was to make believe that they were genteel, and to try to shut away all sight, sound, and sense, of their decent father's honest trade? What human creature endowed with the gift of reason could desire to listen to Mrs. Creamer's mild raptures over Martin Tupper and *The Angel in the House*? And the airs, the clack, and the rustling silks of Mrs. Tracy, the attorney's wife (of course she called herself the solicitor's wife), were a heavy trial of a fastidious woman's patience. Even among people humbler than these, until one got down to the really poor, the great object of the women always seemed to be to convey to Mrs. Alwyn the idea that her visit was something which they had a right to expect as a duty and a tribute to their position; their social rank, in the parish.

Everybody would be a lady ; no one seemed to have courage enough not to be ashamed of what she was, and what her husband was ; all were trying to talk themselves for the moment into the appearance of gentility and social position. Then the talk of the women was all so vapid, so empty, so infantile in its smallness, so old and cunning in its pretension, so absurdly personal and egotistical and uninteresting.

Myra writhed under it all.

"O, my dear Alwyn," she said on their return, as she tossed her bonnet from her, "how I do wish I might say what I think just now without paining you or lowering myself in your eyes, only to relieve my mind just for once !"

"Relieve your mind by all means, dear child," said her husband, putting his arm round her waist and drawing her towards him. "What do you want to say ?"

"To say how much I hate and detest all these people we have been seeing ; how stupid and petty and egotistical and mean they are, all of them. What silly good-for-nothing lives they lead ! What wretched little gabble they talk ! How little they know or care about anything on earth but their own trumpery likings and dislikings ! What affectation there is in everything they say and do ! What snobbery—that's the best word I know for it ! And how much I should like for once—just for once—to have them whipped all round !"

Dr. Alwyn fairly laughed at his wife's energy of vituperation. He did not think any good would come of a solemn lecture just then upon the Christian duty of loving even stupid and snobbish neighbours. But half-jestingly, half-earnestly, he gently talked his wife into a more tolerant mood, and referred, not too elaborately or ponderously, to the many good things which even the vapidest and vainest of the people she raged at had been known to do. To him too their society was often wearisome—almost always inane ; but he made out something to interest him, discovered something of an individuality, in the flattest and dullest of them all. Like Sydney Smith, he never knew what it was to meet a bore.

Dr. Alwyn was one of the few thoroughly unaffected men the civilized world holds at one time. They are very few. The heroic, the honourable, the strictly virtuous, are everywhere ; the thoroughly unaffected, the men who never play a part, who give nature free and honest scope to show her simple best, are rare and strange phenomena. No better advice, and

none more difficult to follow, could be given to man or woman than to say, "Be yourself always; do not fancy you can be anybody else; do not strive to be: above all, do not play at being anybody else. Trust yourself and be yourself. Every act done, every word said, every look put on to any other end, is from the real purpose of your life."

Dr. Alwyn might fairly have given such advice, for this was his unconscious practice. His nature was simple, manly, loyal. He never studied himself, never indulged in the baleful, seducing, egotistical practice of self-examination—that mental and moral opium-eating which enfeebles, makes morbid, and debauches the timid untrusting soul. He was a scholar, and in a certain robust sense a thinker; he loved science, although educated in what Lord Derby called the pre-scientific period; he read largely and liberally; he could write a plain, manly, sensible article in a magazine or newspaper, such as Englishmen of his class like to read, and had done so many a time; he took an interest in almost everything, although he was not much of a politician, and still less of a theologian. His Church was very broad—the broadest that well could be: it embraced all good people, and was only anxious to be able to embrace all the rest. Even on sin, when he saw it, he looked with open, fearless, manly gaze, pitying, but not afraid or miserably and morbidly ashamed; knowing that that too is a disease which the true physician does not quail or blush to look upon, and for which care has been taken to provide a healing and a redemption. He walked through life indeed with firm and robust tread, full of sympathy and pity, but full too of hope and confidence.

CHAPTER XII.

WORKS AND FAITH.

RALPH LENNON was at length fairly settled at home. Some weeks had passed since his last visit to the Wartons, whom he saw more than once during his short stay in London; and he was now established formally in his drear old house by the Waterdale lake. There he lived in a sort of hermitage, with the old Beck people for his domestic staff.

But of some of his neighbours he saw a good deal. While he was yet doubtful about the prospect of a renewal of his acquaintance with the Alwyns, the Rector broke in upon him with a hearty phrase and a warm smile, and they became friends forthwith. Alwyn had long wanted just such an associate in the dull little place—a man who was at once a scholar and no pedant, with masculine ways and some dash of originality. He had a decided liking for university men ; and though he might have liked Lennon equally well in any case, yet it was the convenient basis of a bond of friendship that they both hailed, even at a considerable interval of time, from the same scholastic soil. Before a week had passed they met almost every day.

At first Ralph fought a little shy of the Rector's wife. She was so very pretty, and dressed so very handsomely, that our friend could hardly believe there was anything in her, and assumed at the outset that between her and him there could be no possible sympathy. Indeed he kept so decidedly aloof from her, that Myra became piqued and annoyed, and "did not like him at all ;" but, nevertheless, was quite resolved not to permit her existence to be ignored, and fairly set herself to break down what she considered his misogynist tendencies. Of course she easily succeeded. Alas, there are no misogynists, except among the denizens of the gynæceum. Nobody hates women but a woman. Ralph Lennon was only shy, not cynical ; and he soon found that there was something in Myra Alwyn better than a love for fine clothes. He came to like her, to talk frankly to her now and then, and to believe he was beginning to understand her. She had set out by resolving to dislike him ; is it any wonder that she soon came to take a pleasure in his company ?

He dined with them often ; he looked in upon them at all hours ; he read in Dr. Alwyn's library ; he rode by Mrs. Alwyn's side ; he lifted her to her saddle, he lifted her down ; he acted as her faithful honest cavalier in many of her village journeyings. His presence decidedly infused a freshness into a life somewhat monotonous and staid for one so young. The men of the locality were dreadfully dull ; the women seemed to Myra much duller. She was deeply attached to her husband, and could perhaps have done very well without any other society than his ; but it has been frankly said already that her love for him was a quiet glow, not an all-absorbing rapture.

Therefore there was room for other society besides that of her husband: and it so happened that just at this time Ralph Lennon filled the place. So, having begun by scolding him to her husband, she then went on to praise him loudly; and then to say hardly anything about him, but to look for him silently, and gladden when he came.

Meanwhile to Ralph she was an interesting acquaintance; perhaps a valued friend; certainly nothing more. He had work of his own which deeply engrossed him, and about which he talked more to Dr. Alwyn than to Dr. Alwyn's wife. His days were passing in a congenial and pleasant activity. Perhaps he was about as happy just at this short season of his life as a lonely disappointed man could well expect to be.

This was his mode of life. He had positively and seriously set himself to work to build a model village on his side of the lake. This was his expiation. Aided by his stout friend 'Tom Berry, he had got masons, carpenters, and bricklayers all about him; and he looked after their work for a great part of the day. He had resolutely declined the services of any professional architect, believing that any two sensible men—for example, Berry and himself—could plan out an ordinary cottage as well as Sir Christopher Wren or Sir Charles Barry, and knowing that many additional cottages could be raised for an architect's fee. He was great upon ventilation, water, and separate homes; and in Cumberland one is not compelled by the expensiveness of ground and materials to build a philanthropic barrack, and stow a poor colony away in it. Lennon found that a very neat and pretty cottage might be built on his plan for eighty or a hundred pounds; and two or three thousand pounds would therefore go a long way to the raising of a village. The raising of one village even would enable him to test the experiment he had long had at heart, and in the same process to relieve his mind of a weight by doing some good for somebody in the world.

Lennon's mind was long filled with a deep, almost a morbid, anxiety to "do some good." A devout Roman Catholic actuated by such feelings would have become a Trappist, perhaps, or gone on a mission to the Japanese; a Protestant of our days, if he belonged to one school, would have relieved his soul by erecting an altar, lighting candles, and listening to the confessions of girls; if to another school, would have vented his

noble passion in fierce anathemas against Popery or free thought. Lennon's penitential anxiety took the form of a passionate desire—yes, a very passion—to do some practical good. And one of the old strong faiths he cherished was a belief in the self-governing, self-purifying power of men. So he resolved to found, near his father's resting-place, a small community which should base its physical happiness strictly on the physical laws, and its moral welfare on its own self-governing power.

Dreamer as to some extent he was, yet he did not dream of a New-Lanark or Brook-Farm scheme. These based themselves on an attempt to conquer human nature, to force or stimulate men into what Macaulay calls an impossible frame of mind. Lennon's scheme was that human nature should have its own way and guide itself. He meant to found at least one little community, where the "common sense of all" should rule, and where the laws of physical health should receive in the first instance a fair chance. Nothing grander than that was his idea. Rich men, paternal landowners, and peers, for example, build model villages often, and bring their friends from Belgravia and Park-lane to look at them; but only the shell of the dwelling is improved, if even that, and the dweller is little better than the doll in a doll's house which the childish proprietor shows with all the pride of ownership and absolute mastery to her little companions. Lennon flattered himself that his scheme would be rather different from that; quite the reverse of that in fact.

The ground on which he was laying out the lines of his village was part of a little plain—a very waste—lying between the hills and the lake. There was plenty of room for expansion, if the scheme should succeed. The village might almost swell into a town, and pleasantly encircle the water. But, in any case, it was to be a town for the poor. A town of paupers is a common sight enough, in Ireland at least; but a town wholly of poor, and absolutely without paupers, would be something new in comfortable, money-getting, money-loving England. Each house was to be small, and was to stand apart, with a patch of ground its own possession—a patch of waste as yet, of desert sand, which the magic of property was to convert into a garden. Every dwelling was to be, above all things, perfect in its arrangements for air and water and cleanliness. Trees were to grow and flowers were to blossom everywhere.

Necessarily the cottages were to be of varying sizes ; but Lennon was anxious to have them as much as possible arranged on a plan to discourage, if not actually to preclude, a joint occupation. Of course the education of the children was to form a prime *raison d'être* for the village. There were to be playgrounds, and schools, and a lecture-room, and a great telescope for the use of the classes, and divers other grand appliances for the culture of mind and body. And the result was to be a model colony or village, to be established upon philosophically-coöperative and universal-benevolence principles.

Of course he was to receive rents ? He did not mean to rear a brood of paupers ? So he might in time come to make money by the speculation ?

No. There was the odd part of the business. He gave away the cottages absolutely. He was never to have a farthing by them. The colony was to pay rents to itself—rents to be fixed by itself ; the money was to go into the common fund ; the common fund to be employed for mutual improvement, and for extending the boundaries of the village, by buying more land and building other houses. Lennon was not even to be the patriarch or despot of the village. It was to be governed by itself—that is, by its self-elected committee—and rigid rules were to be laid down for the expulsion of refractory or ill-conducted members. Over this latter part of the scheme Lennon pondered long. Must the ill-conducted be always expelled ? Does social expulsion ever turn the ill-conducted into well-conducted ? After much puzzling, he came despondently to the conclusion that, if his scheme were to work even for a year, he must adopt in this respect the old-fashioned policy of the world he had come to reform, and begin by resolving that the righteous must be allowed to drive the sinners into banishment.

In fact, Lennon was a dreamer, endowed with the unusual activity which really sets itself to work out its dreams. He was fortunate in having by his side, to begin with, one man who believed in him. Tom Berry, having dreamed away half his own life over an impossible reconstruction of the English Constitution on the five points of the Charter, and beginning at last to discover with sadness that most people had forgotten even to denounce or laugh at the poor Charter itself, was rejoiced to be one of the priests of a scheme which proposed to set up a model for the reconstruction of the English people. A village in an obscure part of a northern county could not do

a great deal in the way of example to humanity, were it never so perfect a model ; but Lennon and his man Friday went sturdily to work, on Carlyle's manly principle that if you would have the world heroic you must first make a hero of yourself, and then you have one hero at least to begin with. If you would have a model world, set to work and make your own village a model ; and so you may have one model street, or even cottage to start with.

The village was marked out ; some foundations began to rise already ; and the neighbours lifted eyes and hands, grinned, sneered, wondered, and in rare cases admired. Of the better-class people around, some thought Lennon a madman, some a benevolent idiot, and a few hinted that he had picked up some smart notions in Australia, and that doubtless the thing would pay well and turn out a very handsome speculation in the end. The local attorney, who sustained this view, referred, in illustration of his argument, to the first-rate thing Messrs. Spiers and Pond, the refreshment purveyors from Australia, were now making of their new buffets and dining-halls at the great London railway stations. There could be no doubt about it, he said ; all those fellows from Australia had uncommonly energetic, clever ways about them, and pushed their schemes through where a slow, untravelled Briton could only realize a dead failure. He was, therefore, one of the few in the neighbourhood who were ready to accord a sincere respect to Ralph Lennon and his projects.

What did the Alwyns think about it ?

Ralph had explained his whole plans to Dr. Alwyn before an inch of ground was marked out. The Rector was amused, amazed ; could hardly believe in the seriousness of the project ; then began to be interested and to admire. At least, he sincerely admired the projector, while he felt a thrill of sadness and pity over what he made up his mind, in anticipation, must be the fate of the scheme. Dr. Alwyn had ceased to believe in progress made by sudden springs.

"Can we leap over our own shadow?" he asked Ralph, half sadly, half sportively ; and purposely quoting from one of Lennon's literary heroes and prophets.

"No," replied Lennon ; "but Goethe never said that, if our shadow falls upon our work and prevents us from seeing how to do it, we may not take up a new position and labour in the light."

Dr. Alwyn did not argue the point. He was one of the very, very few men who would rather see a human being attempt to do right in his own way than do nothing because of the fear of going wrong.

Myra, too, felt her own thrill of strange, half-painful admiration for the eccentric freshness and resolution of the projector. But a vague suspicion of the project filled her from the first. She feared, not that it would fail, but that it would succeed. She did not like the sound of the scheme. In Schiller's *Don Carlos* there is a conversation between King Philip and the Marquis of Posa, in which the latter explains his reasons for quitting the king's service. Posa speaks of liberty and human rights; and the shrewd tyrant, jumping to no erroneous conclusion, turns sharply round and says, "You are a Protestant!" Myra's rigid dogmatism was in its way as keen and suspicious as Philip's. When she heard of Lennon's schemes of beneficence, and co-operation, and individual self-government, she felt her heart contract, and was on the point of exclaiming, "This is free-thinking!"

"Is Mr. Lennon a Ritualist, dear?" she asked of her husband.

"No, Myra, I think not; I am sure not, now that I recollect some talk I had with him once on the subject. He is rather inclined to laugh at the thing and let it pass—as I am."

"He is surely not a Roman Catholic, love?"

"Nonsense, Myra! how can you ask? Of course he is not."

"Then pray, dear Alwyn, what is he?"

"Really, I never asked him. You know I don't ask men like him, educated and good men, such questions, or approve of their being asked, or even hinted at. I assume, of course—in fact I have no doubt on the matter—that he is just a sound Protestant like you and me."

"But you told me that he got into some difficulty when at college, wrote something or published something that was not exactly sound Protestantism?"

"Yes, dear; but that was a long time ago—when he was little more than a boy, and was passing through that phase of half poetic, wholly nonsensical infidelity that we all go through. My dear child, I used to devour Volney in secret once upon a time; and I don't know that I had even quite got out of that feeble condition of intellect when the *Vestiges of Creation* came up."

"Yes, that is quite true and sensible; and I am sure I should be very sorry to suspect unjustly; but don't you think there is something rather odd about this project of Mr. Lennon's?"

"Very odd indeed, Myra. Quite nonsensical, I am afraid. The village is sure to be called 'Lennon's Folly.' But I rather admire his energy and courage; he does not care anything about being laughed at, which I fear would sadly alarm and deter *me*. And then he has shown me all the details; it really will not cost so very much. He counts on giving away some three thousand pounds. I wish none of our county magnates ever spent a bigger sum for a worse purpose."

Mrs. Alwyn said no more; but she thought none the less.

Dr. Alwyn went very often to watch the progress of the buildings, and had many a pleasant talk with Lennon, who, dressed in an old coat that would have looked becoming in the bush, and generally smoking a cigar, superintended everything, and put in many an experimental effort in sawing, plastering, and digging, sometimes to the great discomfort of the protesting professional workmen. Dr. Alwyn usually came away admiring, if not hopeful.

Myra went up likewise and surveyed the operations. She was conducted by Tom Berry over the brickheaps and plankings and piles of stones. Lennon happened to be away just then; but Berry did the honours with a grave self-possession that charmed Mrs. Alwyn. *He* thought he had never seen a more graceful, gracious figure, as she picked her steps daintily from place to place; and, with skirts well kilted, stepped lightly as Remus over yet embryo walls. He paid her the highest tribute his heart could give; for he thought, with a heavy pang that almost broke into a sob, that she looked like poor, poor Mary, that day—O, so long ago,—soon after they were married, when they went to Dulwich together, and she wore a purple gown which she had secretly made to surprise him, and never showed to him until she came downstairs dressed and ready to go. He looked so strangely at Mrs. Alwyn that she wondered at his gaze; whereon he crushed down his feelings, and compelled his face to wear its ordinary expression.

"How long have you been here, Mr. Berry?" asked Myra as she was leaving the place.

She always took care to learn people's names, and to call them by name, especially when speaking to those poorer than

herself. All manner of commanders—from Marlborough to Claverhouse—are reported to have secured the favour and affection of their soldiers by always taking care to remember a man's name, and to call him by it.

"Only a few days, ma'am. But I was in these parts long ago, when I was a young man ; before you were born, I dare say."

"Indeed ! There was very little church accommodation here then, I should think. You know our church, Mr. Berry ? Have you been there ?"

"No, ma'am, I have not."

"Not yet, I suppose. But I hope we shall see you there. Dr. Alwyn will look out for you."

"Thank ye, ma'am. You're very kind ; but I don't go to church."

"O, indeed ! I beg pardon ; I did not know that you were a Dissenter. There are chapels here ; and I believe good and pious ministers to preach in them." A splendid burst of liberality on the part of the lady.

"Yes, ma'am ; I have no doubt. I hope there are good men among all the lots. But the truth is I never was much of a church-goer. If I went anywhere, I think I should go to the old Church—the Church of old England ; but I don't, ma'am, I don't go anywhere."

"Indeed, Mr. Berry ! You will pardon me if I say I am very sorry to hear it. You seem so intelligent a man, so much superior to your—to your—"

"To my class, ma'am, you were going to say."

"Well, yes—to your class ; I can't think of any better word, and indeed I don't mean it in any unfriendly or disrespectful sense. But you are so very intelligent and superior a man that I should be sorry to think you as indifferent to religion as you say."

"Not indifferent to religion, ma'am ; at least I hope not ; but church-going mayn't be religion."

"Certainly ; but it is one outward expression of it."

"Perhaps so : with some people it is, no doubt ; but it is only one outward expression at all events, and there are others that come more natural to other people ; and maybe some don't think any outward expression necessary at all. But I'm fond of my class, ma'am, and I'd like to be proud of it too ; and I don't see that the higher classes—

excuse me, ma'am—ever took much thought to give them their equal rights, except the right of going to church, and that not on an equality neither. When they let us vote with them, and counsel with them, and talk up to them, and recognise our rights as we have to recognise theirs, then, ma'am, perhaps it wouldn't be so difficult to get us to pray with them. I saw a little book, ma'am, you left the other day with one of the men yonder, and I read part of it. It made a deal of complaint about the churches being empty, and the Popish chapels always full. Yes, it's quite true. Perhaps you have never been in Ireland, ma'am ; but I have. I've seen the chapels there crammed every Sunday, and the poor creatures—Pagans you and I think 'em, ma'am—crowded together on their knees, and covering the whole chapel-yard ; and I've seen the great stone chapels with spires—chapels like churches, as big as four of that yonder—built out of the voluntary ha'pence of a population of poor peasants. And why is this, ma'am ? I'll tell you ; and you can explain it to the lady or gentleman—lady most likely—who wrote the little book. It's because the Church there is a democracy, ma'am ; it's the people's Church, and they love it, as we all love whatever is our own. That's the secret, ma'am. Make your Church a democracy too ; and you won't have to tout for the attendance of the working-man. Excuse me, ma'am, if I've talked too freely. I wouldn't do it but that I see you are a real lady, who can understand a difference, and put up with it. I'd never talk so to a lady's-maid. But I'm an old Chartist, ma'am, and too fond of talking ; and I ask your pardon."

"Chartist or not," replied Myra, "you have talked openly and frankly ; and your frankness is a compliment. But I hope and firmly believe you are not a free-thinker for all."

"Free thought, ma'am, is the only thing we poor fellows have free, except the air and the grave ; and even *them* aren't free in London."

Mrs. Alwyn left him. She was much surprised, not a little alarmed, a great deal disheartened. She had never before heard from living and believing lips the old vain complaints of the inequality of classes and the political servitude of the working-man. This phase of thought, now so rapidly narrowing, and soon, let us hope, wholly to disappear, had never before exhibited itself thus to her eyes. When the Chartists mustered on Kennington Common, and the scenes which *Alton Locke*

describes were real, she wore trousers, and was learning to trundle a hoop. She had read *Alton Locke* since, but only in the spirit in which she read *Ivanhoe*; and the Chartist tailor seemed to her as completely a figure of the past as the Saxon swineherd or Isaac of York. She always supposed that at present the working-men were perfectly contented with their political and social condition. She thought, indeed, that the wealthier classes did not do half enough for them in the way of education, friendly advice, good example, genial intercourse, and church-building. But she assumed that the good and honest working-man always, as an essential quality of his virtue and honesty, disclaimed any interest in politics, and wanted nothing better than to be properly governed by his superiors. Working-men were of two classes—the bad and the good. The bad showed his badness by drinking too much beer, and kicking his wife in the stomach; the good demonstrated his goodness by keeping sober, loving his family, and always eschewing politics. So Mrs. Alwyn's ideas shaped themselves. Tom Berry was to her a new, strange, and somewhat alarming phenomenon.

If these were the ideas of the man, what might the views of the master be? What might they not be?

Mrs. Alwyn happened to pass another day by the scene of the operations. Lennon was there, and saw her. He flung away his cigar when she came in sight, and strode forward to welcome her. His manner was at first a good deal less composed than that of Tom Berry had been. Half unconsciously and because of his embarrassment, half purposely and to hide the embarrassment, he put into his manner a dash of that light cynicism which so many men adopt when talking to women with whom they are not perfectly at ease and sympathetic. Lennon did not as yet quite understand Myra. Nor did she quite understand him; but of the two her perceptions went nearer to the truth than his.

"What an odd, original sort of person you have got here, Mr. Lennon!" she said, in the course of a few minutes' talk over the progress of the buildings. "Do you know he quite puzzled and surprised me the other day."

"Whom do you mean, Mrs. Alwyn?"

"The person who showed me all this. There he is yonder, talking to those masons. Your superintendent, or what is he? —Mr. Berry."

"O, my friend Tom Berry."

"Is he a friend?"

"Certainly."

Affectation! Radicalism! Sentiment put on. Liberty and equality!—stuff and nonsense! I don't believe a word of it. So thought Mrs. Alwyn; and she slightly shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, your friend Mr. Berry. I talked some time with your friend. Did he tell you?"

"He did."

"And he seemed to me to be a remarkable man. Although not perhaps educated, yet he spoke very well. What I particularly liked about him was his entire straightforwardness and freedom from affectation. He was simple and manly—rather rare qualities, I think, when people seem to believe it right to affect so much of eccentricity and cynicism."

"He is a manly, honest fellow. I liked him from the first moment I spoke with him. He has suffered much lately. He had a wife who I believe was his sole companion, and kept him straight in every way; and now she's dead. She died only a few weeks ago; and they had no children, and he has neither kith nor kin in the world."

"Poor fellow! I thought there was a deep shadow over him. Did you know them long?"

"No, indeed; I may say a very short time. I never saw *her*. I only went by chance to see him, and I found him alone—or almost alone—with a dead woman. I liked him, Mrs. Alwyn; so would you, if you knew him. He is a disappointed man, poor fellow, and I felt drawn to him. Do you know I only saw him once before the time I went to his house? But I think one cannot be mistaken about men like him. I knew him from the first."

"And you brought him down here," thought Mrs. Alwyn, "he being a common workman, because you wished to withdraw him from the associations of sorrow, and to do him good. Just what I should have expected. But why affect cynicism? why talk as if you were idle, careless, and good-for-nothing? why affect anything?"

"It is strange," she said aloud, "that such a man with such a sorrow should have his heathenish views."

"What are heathenish views, Mrs. Alwyn?"

"His are, I think ; and I am sorry for it. Do you know, Mr. Lennon, he says he never goes to church ?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Alwyn. I am sorry if poor Tom is a downright heathen. But I suppose there were some rather worthy heathens, were there not?—decent sort of fellows in their way ?"

"Yes, I suppose some heathens were good men ; but there were excuses for them. They were ignorant of the truth ; they could not be blamed. In our days education seems rather to be the snare."

Mrs. Alwyn stopped. She felt that it would be ridiculous to get into a theological controversy, especially when she was likely to become angry. She was quite too young and pretty a woman to consent to make herself ridiculous even in the cause of sacred truth. The Goddess of Wisdom herself was woman enough to fling away the flute when it puffed her cheeks. Myra felt that *her* cheeks were reddening ; and she put theology aside, to take care of itself for the moment.

But she presently went her way, thinking of Lennon, and admiring what she believed to be his goodness, and telling herself it was only his goodness she admired, and much vexed with doubts and dreads about what she feared to be his want of religion ; for since he had come to the neighbourhood she watched for him every Sunday at church, and watched in vain.

It so chanced that the very first of these Sundays she dressed with even unusual brilliancy and pains ; and he never came. Next Sunday, growing alarmed for his spiritual welfare, she watched anxiously ; and he never came. Her husband preached a manly, vigorous, and, in fact, touching sermon, wherein, according to his wont, he rattled no dry bones of theology, but only touched on living immortal truths—sublime eternal chords, to which every heart not all seared and imbruted vibrates in response. Myra much wished that Lennon had been there. She thought of Lennon all the time. She applied every sentence of the sermon mentally to Lennon, and Lennon did not come to church that Sunday.

The Sunday after the conversation with Lennon was a crisis. Myra had made many slight and expressive intimations of her hope to see Lennon at church ; and he did not come that day—clearly never meant to come at all. But more than that. A day or two before, he happened to be at Dr. Alwyn's house ;

and, as chance would have it, a fragment of glowing silk of an exquisite purple shade lay on Myra's table, and Lennon, little skilled in the art of composing dress, yet could not help involuntarily remarking on the beauty of the colour. Whereupon Myra promptly declared that she was delighted, for she was going to wear a dress of that very silk next day, and was glad to have her judgment of it confirmed. And she did wear the dress; and she looked very charming; and she looked for Lennon at church—and he did not come. She went home wondering, vexed, grieved; in dreadful fear about Lennon's religion and his soul; in some suspicion, perhaps for the first time, of the nature of her own feelings. But she kept the dress on, and Lennon did not come; and she wore it next day, and it so happened that he did not come. At last she went to her dressing-room, towards evening, and tore the dress off and flung it from her; and then became for the first time all red with shame and self-condemnation, and cried bitter tears, and positively dreaded the approach of her husband until her cheeks and eyes should have ceased to be tell-tales.

She seemed to have awakened with a sudden and fearful start—as a sleep-walker who just comes to her senses and finds herself on the brink of a river. With the shock of self-discovery came the instinctive retreat and escape. One of weaker nerves might have staggered and fallen over. Myra Alwyn had a true heart and a firm resolution. She made up her mind that she must break off her intimacy with one for whose coming she began to look out so anxiously, and whose absence was a disappointment. But she had not courage enough to look this determination and its true first motive fairly in the face. The very necessity of such a resolution had shame in it which she dared not encounter. So she fell back upon the narrowness of her religious training, and told herself that, if Mr. Lennon should prove to be anything but what she considered a true Christian, neither she nor her husband must be perilled by the intercourse of an unbeliever. Nor was this quite insincere. Her dread of heterodoxy—at all events, of heresy—was deep-rooted and genuine. She was literally afraid of what the Poet-laureate terms honest doubt.

This was almost immediately after the conversation about Tom Berry's defective theology. It was that conversation, indeed, which caused Lennon to keep away from Dr. Alwyn's for a day or two. He thought he saw clearly enough what the

Rector's wife meant. He thus translated it into plain English : " We cannot catechise *you* or find fault with you about your religion, because you are supposed to be a gentleman, and above Sunday-school teaching. But if you were a working-man, we would insist upon knowing your views, and, so far as we could, making your errors penal." At first he felt vexed and offended, and thought he had better keep his errors and himself apart ; and he did remain away for a day or two, as has been related. Then he said to himself, " No ; there is no need of sulkiness, and there shall be no concealment. I'll meet the matter fairly. They shall know, frankly and at once, the worst."

He went up to Dr. Alwyn's the very next day. Myra was on the steps of the door just as he entered the lawn. She was in a riding-habit, and her pony was being brought round from the stable. She was about to scour the neighbouring villages on some good errand or other.

Dr. Alwyn was, unfortunately, not at home ; and Lennon was disappointed. Having made up his mind to come to a distinct understanding, it was provoking to find that he had come for nothing. His face so distinctly expressed disappointment, that Mrs. Alwyn could not help asking whether it was anything very particular about which he wanted to speak with her husband. Lennon rushed at the opening thus made.

" No, Mrs. Alwyn ; not anything very serious, perhaps, but something which I feel that I ought to say. I will say it to you, if you will allow me."

" Certainly, Mr. Lennon." She was surprised, and almost agitated. " Will you come in ?"

" Thank you, no. Here, if you please."

She came down the steps, the skirt of her riding-dress thrown over her arm.

" Mrs. Alwyn, the truth is that something you said the other day made me think that perhaps you and Dr. Alwyn have been disappointed at not finding in me a sympathy—a religious sympathy, I mean—which I cannot give. I think I ought to tell you frankly why. To me such things matter nothing—no one's religious opinions could repel me from him. But I am quite aware—nobody can know it better—that my views may repel others. It is right that no one should be deceived on the point, else I should be ashamed to come here and talk so much about myself. But the truth—which I think you ought to know—is that my religious convictions are not yours, or those

of most persons. Mrs. Alwyn, I am what I suppose *you* would call an infidel."

There was ever so slight a tone of contempt in his voice as he spoke these words.

"Oh no, Mr. Lennon; that I cannot believe. You wrong yourself. You are no infidel. You who—no, it's quite impossible."

"I chose the word purposely, because I thought it the one that people who think all depends on sectarian belief would readily apply. I do not acknowledge myself an infidel. I try to be simply a Christian. But I don't believe in the importance of any of your sectarian dogmas. They are names—not things. I have paid some social penalties already for my beliefs; and I will again, if necessary. Just now it would be hypocrisy of me to go to your church—or perhaps to any; and I think it only honest to tell you frankly the cause."

The first question that rose to Mrs. Alwyn's lips was a natural one:

"Why tell this to me?"

She put the question, and then wished she had said something else. By you—to me. All such linkings of persons seem suggestive, and under certain circumstances dangerous.

"I did not mean to tell it to you, Mrs. Alwyn, or to trouble you about it. But then Dr. Alwyn is not here; and you are not a woman of the ordinary kind; and I know that what interests your husband interests you. And besides," said Lennon, smiling faintly, "you have brought it on yourself; for you spoke yesterday with positive alarm about poor Tom Berry's heathenish condition. I much fear that I am yet more heathenish than Tom—who appears to me, indeed, to be rather a man of a deep-thinking and devotional turn; and, to judge by your words yesterday, you would probably think he had excuses for heathenism which I have not. *He* never was at college, as I was. If he had been, I am quite sure he would not have left it—as I did."

"Well, Mr. Lennon, you are very frank and honourable; and I might have expected nothing less from you. Of course I respect your sensitive dread of being supposed to conceal anything which might affect the judgment of your friends—or of the world. May I speak as frankly as you have done?"

"I would beg you to do so as a favour."

"Thank you. Then I must say that I thought yesterday

you affected a cynicism, and carelessness, and scorn of the world's opinion, and reluctance to be thought benevolent, and all that, which does not really belong to your nature. I know perfectly well that you have a generous and noble heart. Please don't interrupt me—I am not going to say any more in your praise, and would not say even this, but that I have to found a reproach upon it. Are you sure that you are not now exaggerating what you call your heathenism? To prove that they are not subservient, some men make themselves rude, and are brusque to an earl when they would be civil to a peasant. Are you not doing, in your own way, something of the same kind? To show your scorn of hypocrisy and conventionality, are you not magnifying dissent into hostility, and doubt into infidelity?"

"No, I think not; I think I am only putting myself before you exactly as you would see me. One can't well launch into an analysis and exposition of one's theology, which, indeed, with me is mostly negative; but I do honestly believe that you would regard my faith with dread and repugnance if you did know it. You spoke of doubts; I have no doubts. I do not care to trouble myself with doubt of what is to us wholly insoluble and unfathomable. Dissent? I do not dissent. If someone came to me with a new and plausible theory about the inhabitants of some far-off planet, could I be said to dissent from it? Not at all. I know nothing about it; and I refuse to waste my time in pondering and quarrelling over a problem neither he nor I nor anyone else can solve, as yet."

Mrs. Alwyn found herself sinking into unknown and dreadful depths. She would plunge in no farther: that way madness lies.

"I wish you would speak to my husband, Mr. Lennon. He is a clever man, as you know, and a scientific man; and he could, I am sure, remove the doubts and delusions you seem to have. I wish I could; for you would be worth converting. Do, do speak to him. You do not know how well he can explain all these seeming difficulties."

"I quite intended to talk to Dr. Alwyn; but only as I have talked to you, just to put him fairly on his guard. But in good truth I have little faith in polemical discussion, and hardly any interest whatever in it. Once, when a younger man, I was antagonistic and vehement enough; and I sought out opponents, and rather rejoiced in combats of words and texts, and

wild whirling logic ; and I think I revelled in the punishment and disgrace it brought on me, and fancied myself a martyr when I was only a fool. Now I have changed all that. I think such controversy is just one of our temptations, like idleness and envy, and acquisitiveness and military glory, and divers other things ; and I pray that my feet may be delivered from its snares."

"I am glad to hear that you pray for anything, and I forgive the tone in which you say so."

"Thank you. I really did not mean it as a sneer, though it may have sounded like one. I spoke as I feel. I am much obliged to you for having listened to me so patiently and kindly, and I have nothing more to say."

He was about to take his leave. She hesitated over the dismissal, as if she had something more to say.

"We continue friends, Mr. Lennon?"

"I hope so. It would be a great pain to me if we did not. I have lost many friends through this cause ; and it cost me an effort to risk the losing of Dr. Alwyn's friendship and yours ; but I trust that no such result may come. Only I thought it right that you should know all. The rest is for him and you."

When Lennon was gone, Mrs. Alwyn found herself deeply agitated. She sent her pony away, and neglected her round of familiar duties ; she secluded herself in her own room, and tried to think the matter over calmly.

People who live in London and read the weekly papers, and learn of the *Saturday Review* that one's duty to society is not to feel any earnestness about anything, could hardly perhaps appreciate the nature of Mrs. Alwyn's feelings when listening to and half-following Ralph Lennon's confession of faith. In society, doubtless, Lord Shaftesbury would meet without mental disquietude the author of *Ecce Homo* ; and the most orthodox detestation of *Essays and Reviews* does not imply a necessary repugnance to converse with Dr. Temple. When the *Morning Advertiser* was most fiercely denouncing the author of a certain famous passage in an essay on Sir William Hamilton, it is likely that the wife of the editor (if he has one) of that organ of intellectual culture and pure theology would have felt rather proud than otherwise of meeting Mr. Mill. But in remote parts of the country things are not so. There we are terribly in earnest, and our women are still more in earnest than we.

There, too, we positively refuse to separate the man from his opinions ; the dogma is the man.

Myra Alwyn was the daughter of a pious clergyman, the wife of another pious clergyman. Pure Protestantism flowed into her from her mother's breast ; and however Ralph Lennon's doubts and heresies might in reality come to be softened down, they could hardly be translated into pure Protestantism. At best they were the sentiments of a man who professed to walk without the aid of guidance which with her it was a sin to renounce. It was not merely the presumption of a man who declared his determination to find his way across a forest at midnight without the aid of guide or lamp or starlight. Such a man might succeed ; and if he did, his success was his vindication. But in Lennon's case it would be equal guilt to succeed or fail by any guidance but the legitimate and prescribed conductors. To arrive at the end was nothing ; the indispensable obligation was to arrive there by the proper path, and lighted by the orthodox lamps.

Therefore Myra shuddered and trembled—O, yes ; and worse than that, she blushed and was abashed, though quite alone ; for she could not hide from herself that she felt too keen an interest in Lennon's life, and that she was pierced with a strange pang when she put the hesitating question, " We continue friends ? "

All the greater reason for a prompt and firm resolution. So when Dr. Alwyn returned she told him the whole story, repeating as well as she could every word Lennon had said.

Dr. Alwyn promised to see and speak with him, but evidently did not think the thing quite so dreadful as his wife did.

" Promise me one thing, Alwyn, dear," she asked with unwonted trepidation.

" What is it, love ? Rash promises, you know I must not make, even to you, Herodias."

" Promise you will not ask him here any more—ever again."

" Why, dear child, this is fanaticism ! Besides, he is a fine manly fellow, Lennon ; and I hope to cure him of his nonsense in a week."

" Still I don't want to see him here any more—I don't indeed. Do promise me this, dear, dear husband—promise me that I shall not have to meet him any more ! "

Dr. Alwyn laughingly declined the promise ; but he wondered much over the stern and unforgiving orthodoxy of women. He had never seen his wife so earnest on such a subject before.

CHAPTER XIII.

WARTON'S NEW SENSATION.

DR. ALWYN walked over the very next day to have a talk with Lennon. He had no idea of treating his friend's supposed mental condition too seriously. The position of a father confessor, although growing into rapid favour in the Church of England, still appeared to Alwyn highly incongruous, unmanly, and absurd. Moreover, he knew that women of a pious turn commonly concern themselves about the letter and not the spirit of orthodoxy ; and he therefore did not yet despair of finding Lennon at heart a much sounder Protestant than Dr. Colenso.

But all chance of any conversation on such a subject was cut off ; for Dr. Alwyn found that there were visitors wakening up with unwonted laughter and talk the ghostly old echoes of Lennon's house. Walter Warton had kept his word, and come promptly to see his old friend, and he had brought Captain Eastham with him ; and they announced that they were quite determined to make themselves at home for a day or two. Captain Eastham had a pretty country seat some twenty miles off, which Warton was just now making his headquarters for special reasons. There was a certain borough quite near which happened to have a large proportion of working men enrolled as freemen on its electoral lists. Eastham had some proprietorial influence there ; and it was thought that Warton's name and tongue might win over the working men, and between the two influences the borough be annexed to the Tory interest. So Warton was to try his chance there. A vacancy was very soon expected ; and Eastham's goodnature had secured for Warton an opportunity of making the attempt. The money was to be "found," and he was to have every fair chance—probably his last chance ; for if he could do nothing with the working men he would be of no use to the Tories.

Therefore he was glad to make Captain Eastham's his camping-ground at present ; and being in the neighbourhood of Lennon's place, he had special reasons for wishing to come that way. And he was glad of Eastham's company. It was not quite certain how he and Lennon might get on alone.

Dr. Alwyn was glad to meet all the party, and insisted on their coming over to dine at his house that very day ; Lennon's bachelor establishment needing no apology if it frankly admitted itself not quite prepared for a friendly invasion at an hour's notice. The invitation was accepted : Lennon welcomed it because he understood it to mean an absolution for his theological errors ; Warton welcomed it because the unpreparedness of Lennon's house struck him rather with a chill and dread, and he was relieved by the prospect of a really good dinner at Dr. Alwyn's, and the society of Dr. Alwyn's pretty wife.

"Then you *are* bringing him after all !" said the latter to her husband when he came back, like a sensible man, to prepare her for her guests. "You are bringing him, though I asked you not to do so."

"Bringing Lennon ? O yes ; you really can't be serious in your objection, Myra. We shall never cure heathenism, my love, by social exclusion ; and I really don't believe Lennon is one whit less of a Christian than I am."

Mrs. Alwyn was angry—unreasonably bitter and angry. But she said nothing, and made no sign. She dressed with great care, and she resolved to receive Lennon politely but coldly. So she would have done, doubtless, only that poor Lennon, accepting, as has already been said, the invitation as a warm and liberal declaration of unabated friendship, was so unusually genial in his greeting, so delicately amicable in the fervent pressure of his hand, that Myra, taken at disadvantage, gave him a look and a touch of frank regard ; and then flushed all over as if she had done something wrong, and so markedly changed her place to converse with Captain Eastham that Warton's watchful eyes flashed as he saw her, and she felt in every fibre that Warton saw and watched her. Whereupon she became so uncomfortable that it needed her utmost self-control to enable her to discharge fittingly all the small social duties of her position as mistress of the house.

The dinner passed off very pleasantly. Captain Eastham kept them all in good spirits with his genial and rattling talk ; Lennon was unusually animated ; Warton was in complete

happiness. For he sat next to Myra; and she, fearful of having relaxed too much from proper religious severity towards Lennon, compensated and made atonement by almost entirely ignoring his existence, and allowing herself to seem engrossed by Warton. The latter paid her many sweet and covert compliments, to most of which she replied by gracious and beaming smiles, each one of which penetrated him with hope and joy. She was unconscious of his peculiar happiness, and, indeed, very seldom knew what he was saying. When she smiled most sweetly and graciously on him, the smile did not mean "My soul is of kin with yours;" but simply, "I haven't been listening to a word you are saying. I am thinking of something quite different; but I don't want you or anybody else to know it."

She was uneasy, angry, anxious. For the first time in her married life—a short career indeed, thus far—she felt displeased with her husband, and, what was perhaps worse, distrustful of his judgment and guiding power. And she felt still more displeased with herself, but not as yet distrustful. An era in her life had come—a critical era in the life of a married woman—when she stood isolated in the midst of fears and doubts and danger which she could not or would not make known to her husband.

The party round that dinner-table were therefore playing a pretty little game of cross-purposes. Captain Eastham was perhaps the only *convive* perfectly on the square, open, and having no *arrière-pensée* behind the screen of his words.

After Myra left the table, a short political conversation set in. Warton, however, disappeared almost immediately, and found her alone and thoughtful in the drawing-room.

"Our friends are buried in politics," he said; "and my life is so steeped in the political atmosphere that I am happy now and then to breathe a purer air. Eastham is a rising man in the House."

"I like Captain Eastham very much," said Myra. "He is so vivacious and pleasant."

"Yes, Eastham's a fine fellow. But what do you think of your near neighbour, Mr. Lennon?"

"My husband likes Mr. Lennon very much. I believe he has great ability. I should think it will be rather thrown away here."

"Lennon has ability decidedly, and is a man who might make

some way in life—except, perhaps, for his somewhat extreme opinions on religious questions. At least, his opinions used to be extreme. I do not know for certain that he has not changed or modified them ; but I rather inferred from a recent conversation with him that he had not. It is deeply to be regretted—not of course because of any social disadvantage extreme views may bring, but upon other and higher grounds.”

“What are his opinions, Mr. Warton ?”

“I think a sort of spiritualised rationalism, if that expression is at all intelligible : a belief or unbelief compounded of Renan and Mill. I doubt if he defines it very clearly to himself.”

“Can a man be good who has no clear faith ?” said Myra, questioning herself perhaps rather than her listener.

“O, surely ; I think so. Let us hope so at least—although a ship without an anchor is hardly a safe vessel to make a voyage in : but I think Lennon a high-minded man, full of honourable aspirations.” (Warton was not simple enough to begin disparaging his friend in the hope of thereby turning a woman against him.) “I have known him a long time—with a great gap intervening to be sure—and always esteemed him. My wife, too, knew him for many years, and thinks highly of him.”

“By the way, Mr. Warton, that reminds me,” said Myra, glad to change the subject, “that you never told me you had a wife. I never knew it until lately.”

“Did I not ?” He paused, gave a faint sigh, seemed to recover himself with an effort, and went on. “Surely I must have done so. But I seldom had the pleasure of talking to you except in a crowd. Never before, I think, but once—and that only for a few minutes, not soon forgotten—was it my fortune to meet you *tête-à-tête*. But I ought to have told you, as I know that you would kindly take an interest. O yes, I have been married these many years. I married, in fact, when very young.”

“I hope to have the pleasure of meeting your wife. Does she never come northward ?”

“Indeed no ; she keeps always at home, and does not live in London. She dislikes London, and is wholly domestic. I fear my ways distract her ; for she does not care about political questions or literary subjects, and I suppose I can talk of nothing else. She is very good, I often think, to bear with me at all—she whose ways are so different.”

"Poor fellow," thought Mrs. Alwyn. "When he was very young he married some silly and, perhaps, vulgar goose of a girl; and now she has no sympathy with him, and is no companion for him. I am very sorry." She looked this, too, as she sincerely felt it; and Warton saw it in her dark eyes as she allowed them to rest on his for the first time with an expression of genuine interest. There was a moment's pause.

"The last time I had the pleasure of meeting you," he said in a low tone, "we sang together. I remember our duets."

"And so do I. Why may we not repeat them when our friends come up from their political discussion? I daresay it will not last much longer."

"No, I fear not—I mean, I suppose not. I have thought of our last duet many times. Does Dr. Alwyn sing? I believe not."

"O dear, no; not a note. But he is fond of music."

"I have a niece," said Warton,—"*my wife's* niece at least—who sings very charmingly, and is a very clever intelligent girl. Indeed, our house could hardly exist without her. Now *her* I should be so anxious to introduce to you."

"I am sure I should be very happy; really, Mr. Warton, there is nothing I sigh for here more often than the company of an intelligent woman. Your niece is a woman, I suppose?—I mean grown up—not a schoolgirl? I detest schoolgirls."

"O no; twenty years old I should think; and a handsome girl, too."

"Then I really hope I shall know her."

"Some time I will take the liberty of bringing her to see you."

"Thank you; I shall be very glad. I am very lonely here sometimes."

"Lonely, perhaps; but not without sympathy. *You* could not be so."

"Life would indeed be hard and dreary without sympathy," said Myra,—thinking, it must be owned, of herself, and how Dr. Alwyn had failed to understand her.

"It is hard and dreary without sympathy. We cannot all be calm philosophers of the Stoic school, like my friend Lennon. Some of us are not so calm and unemotional; not so good, perhaps. We are of the earth, earthy; and we want human love and sympathy, and other vanities which your philosopher can dispense with."

"Here come all our philosophers," said Myra, not very sorry perhaps that the conversation was cut short.

The rest of the evening was bright and pleasant. When the company broke up, Dr. Alwyn walked with his friends half way round the lake ; and when he returned he sat up reading the *Quarterly Review*, in which Captain Eastham had directed his attention to a slashing political article by a well-known Tory guerilla, the purpose whereof was to indicate explicitly that England could never get on until the Tory party in the House of Commons was led by one of the old territorial aristocracy. It was rather late when Dr. Alwyn went to bed. His wife was not asleep ; but as she kept her eyes closed, and did not speak a word, he assumed that she was wrapt in dreams ; and he himself soon really slept, while she lay awake.

Next day Captain Eastham and Ralph went out shooting. Warton took a gun in his hand, but did nothing ; avowed that even if he had good sight, which he had not, he never could hit a haystack ; and presently left his companions altogether. He soon found his way to Dr. Alwyn's ; and as Alwyn the previous night had declined joining the party, on the ground that he had some duties to look after in the town, Warton counted on finding Myra alone at home. His conjecture proved right ; she had not been out that morning. When she entered the room into which he had been shown, she looked so fascinating in her artistically negligent morning-dress, that Warton felt a fierce pang of admiration and Tantalus-delight shoot through his sensuous heart. He looked full into her eyes, and thought he would have given years of life to discern one ray, however evanescent and faint, of responsive light there. Nay, had her eyelids even fallen under his gaze, he would have felt his pulses beat with quickened fervour. But her smile was calm, friendly, and unconscious of secret meaning ; it was clear as the lake that lay not far from the windows, and almost as unemotional.

"Again you have left your friends, Mr. Warton," she said. "What a truant they must find you ! I hope they don't grumble, or blame me for it."

"Not they ; I fancy they are rather glad to get rid of me. I am a stupid companion for sporting men : I don't care to shoot ; I am a dreadfully bad shot ! and—only one is rather ashamed to express a humanitarian sentiment just now—I would say that I don't enjoy the killing of poor little birds."

"Then you only come to pay us a visit because it is less tiresome and wrong than to spend the day killing little birds?"

"Nay, I am quite willing the birds should fall in any numbers, if their deaths give me a decent chance of escaping and coming over here. I expected to find Dr. Alwyn here—of course."

Warton meant her to understand that he said this for form's sake, and to interpret it by the rule of contraries. She took it, however, quite seriously and literally.

"Dr. Alwyn will be here before long; and I hope you will stay to luncheon, then you will be sure to see him; for he is very punctual always."

"If I do not interrupt you—"

"Oh no; at least, not in anything that suffers by interruption. You perceive that I don't make complimentary speeches. I was only touching up some drawings, Swiss sketches, and that sort of thing. It is an article of faith with Dr. Alwyn that I am an artist; and I fear it pleases me that he should think so, even though I know in my heart that I have no shadow of claim to the title."

"May I see the sketches?"

"Indeed you may not, in their present condition; when they are finished there will then be nothing in them to justify either parading them or making a show of withholding them. Does your niece draw, Mr. Warton? You spoke last night of her singing."

"Yes: she has a perfect passion for the pencil, and is, I am told—for I am no judge—full of promise. Her ambition is to be an artist; I think rather to be a sculptor than a painter. I have a sketch of hers with me. I brought it to show to Lennon, who was kind enough to express some interest in the girl."

"Indeed! Is Mr. Lennon then an artist?"

"I believe so. At least, he understands all about art."

"How strange! He seems to take as much pains to hide his accomplishments as other people do to show off theirs. Why does he choose to force upon our notice only his bad qualities?"

There was a bitterness of tone about these words which Myra could not wholly conceal.

"I don't know. He is a strange creature, Lennon, and always was. He takes sudden likings and dislikings. The

interest he showed in my niece is something, I fancy, quite unusual for him. He made her promise that she would send him a sketch—a design for a group which she dreams of executing some day in marble : and I have brought the sketch ; but until now I quite forgot all about it.”

“Have you it here?”

“Yes. It is very small : I brought it in my pocket-book.”

“May I see it?”

“Surely ; with pleasure.”

He took from his pocket a small square of drawing-board, with two figures on it, and the faint outlines of some brush-wood and heath around them. Mrs. Alwyn held it so that the light might best display its forms and character. She looked at it for a long time in silence.

“Yes,” said she at last, and she struggled with a sigh, “that is indeed something different from mine. I could never do anything like that—never. Such simplicity, and such force and soul. There is a wonderful bareness about it, and yet what expression it has ! All seems done in a few strokes. I have not asked you what it is. Is it the Belisarius story?”

“No ; it is Antigone with Œdipus.”

“Oh yes, to be sure. I heard it read once in London. What a beautiful design for a group ! Is this positively promised—to Mr. Lennon?”

“Yes, indeed. My niece seldom shows anything she does to anybody. I do not know how Lennon contrived to persuade her to send him this.”

“She ought to be happy,” said Mrs. Alwyn with a half-sigh. “I mean happy because she has so much of talent, so much power to create. *She* never can be lonely. She can always fill her life with images of beauty and nobleness, and be happy that way at least, if not otherwise.”

In Myra’s eyes there positively sparkled a tear. She would have given much to prevent it from falling on her cheek, but that was hopeless. She turned away.

Walter Warton saw it. “In this household,” he thought, “there is something wrong. This woman is unhappy, and believes herself unappreciated.” He was touched—really touched. A man one shade or two worse than he might, under the circumstances, have been glad of what he saw, and hailed the tear that gleamed in a wife’s eye as a sparkle of hope.

But he was only a sensuous and unwittingly selfish man, and he felt touched.

"I will tell my niece," he said in a low tone, "how kindly you have spoken. It will make her happy ; it will make her love *you*. That alone would be happiness."

He ventured to rise from his seat, approach her, and take her hand. The manner of his doing this was so entirely that of mere gratitude, manly sympathy, and friendship, that it did not even occur to her to withdraw the hand which he touched. It would indeed have appeared but coquetry to do so. He only pressed the hand warmly and respectfully, and resumed his seat. Myra's heart opened to him. She saw in him only affection and pride for his niece, and an ardour of generous gratitude for even a few words of sympathetic tone. She hoped that in his gratification he had not noticed her own strange and sudden emotion.

When he held her hand in his—for that one moment, that lightning-flash of time—all the soul of passion was at his lips and in his eyes. He waited—yes, in that brief second he seemed positively to watch and wait—for one single responsive pressure, the slightest, the faintest. As the agonised watcher holds the mirror to the lips of the newly dead, hoping against hope that the lightest shade may dim its surface and tell of life yet lingering, so did Warton long for any almost imperceptible return of the pressure he gave to that white small hand. There was none. The hand of a sister could not have been more honestly calm and kindly. That ray of hope was not given.

It was not long before Dr. Alwyn returned. It was part of the purpose of Warton—if, indeed, he could be said to have any deliberate purpose—to wait for Myra's husband. He was not a fool, to give anyone the slightest chance just now of suspecting that he paid his visit only to Dr. Alwyn's wife. Alwyn was glad to see him—he was almost always glad to see a man ; although he would have perhaps preferred Captain Eastham's more robust and vivacious ways, and would have liked Ralph Lennon best of all.

Next morning Wharton and Eastham came over to say good-bye for a while. Both promised to come that way soon again and often.

It was not until he was actually leaving Lennon's house that Warton gave Ralph the sketch of *Antigone*. He had forgotten

it until just that moment—was nearly forgetting it altogether, he said. Superfluously prudent, he thought it would be quite as well not to let Lennon suppose that he attached any importance to the whole affair, or was anxious to exhibit the accomplishments of his niece to a man still young and supposed to have plenty of money.

Life now seemed to Warton all glowing and roseate and purple, with a new interest and emotion. For the moment his political hopes and plans were of secondary importance ; the cares and difficulties, and even dangers, that were darkening round him seemed to have vanished in an unnatural brightness of sunlight. The new emotion was all. Again and again he had broken his idol, ambition, on the altar of some sudden, selfish, and sensuous caprice. He did so when, as he now bitterly thought, he made a fool of himself, and flung himself away on poor Mabel. Steady purpose of any kind must have made him successful in life ; but even his selfishness was merely the unthinking selfishness of a child who opens his hand and lets his plaything fall into the stream, that he may greedily grasp by its crimson blossom some flower that grows upon the bank.

CHAPTER XIV

LENNON'S RENEWED YOUTH.

MANY weeks passed away. The winter had come, and locked the mountain-passes in snow, and then gradually melted into spring ; and half the spring was done. Lennon's model village, delayed though it was by the severity of the winter, was rising rapidly to completion. Many of the cottages were already occupied, and their newly-whitened walls were gladdened by the laughter of children. But as yet the village had not assumed any distinctive character, nor got into self-government. Many tenements remained to be finished before this could be done. There was therefore nothing as yet to attract attention or offend routine, or touch the sensitive nerves of provincial orthodoxy.

Lennon found time passing rapidly and pleasantly, though he still tenanted his gloomy old house, and saw few people there. He rose, worked, ate, read, slept, just as suited him—

sometimes going to bed with the lark, sometimes outwatching the Bear. He read much ; he busied himself almost continually with his work. He talked a good deal with Tom Berry and a good deal with Dr. Alwyn ; but Myra he seldom saw. He accepted the understanding that his want of faith condemned him in her eyes ; and he kept away and cultivated his garden, calm and practical as another Candide. In truth, he was for the present happy. Activity, earnestness, and hope made life put forth new blossoms for him. He was looking younger by years than when he returned from Australia.

Walter Warton he not unfrequently saw. The preliminary campaigns of the expected election were being carried on, and they brought Warton frequently down to the North ; and he always found his way to Dr. Alwyn's house, and generally visited Ralph. He had installed himself as an accepted friend at Alwyn's, where his visits and his political news, and his gossip of London and the clubs and the universities, were very welcome to the Rector. He corresponded with Ralph a good deal, but not in his own hand.

Warton had a happy knack of making people, and especially women, work for him. A former chapter showed how he usually, when at home, adopted his niece as his secretary. He always did so when there was any occasion of writing to Ralph Lennon. The latter therefore received frequent letters in a firm, free, feminine hand, which at last grew quite friendly to him, and which he liked to see for the mere pleasure of seeing it. First the letters used to come as simply dictated by Warton, and began "My dear Lennon," and ended with Warton's name in his own writing. Then Warton found that his niece could write a letter expressing all he wanted to say without his dictating every word ; and he would therefore merely ask her to write to Ralph on this or that subject, and leave her to construct the epistle after her own fashion. So Lennon used to receive letters at first beginning "My dear sir," and then "My dear Mr. Lennon," and ending with the writer's own name—the substance always, of course, being something which "Walter wishes me to ask you," or "to tell you." Sometimes a friendly message from Mabel would come in ; sometimes a big scrawling letter signed "Watty," and generally having relation to the homes and habits of lions, would be enclosed. Ralph received these communications with a vague feeling of pleasure and a quite new sense of companionship.

He had been in town several times during the winter, and spent some hours each time with Warton's family. Indeed he began to make all sorts of excuses for running up to London every now and then ; and his appearance at Warton's house, where Warton seldom was, became the regular signal for a sort of holiday. He brought presents to the children ; he took them to the Zoological Gardens, Grace accompanying. He took Grace alone to see picture-galleries and sculpture ; his visits brightened her life and his unspeakably. He felt a great pleasure in her society, and soon became as frank and unreserved with her as only a shy and sensitive man becomes with those in whom he truly confides, and with whom he can sympathize. She was so much younger that he felt, or believed he felt, only such delight in her company as that to which Swift, in some lines of tender beauty, likens the pure friendly joy Cadenus used to feel in the society of Vanessa. All London soon became, in his heart, identified with the society of Grace Ethelstone ; and his visits there refreshed his life, and charmed its sad loneliness away.

On one of these occasions he gave his opinion of *Oedipus* and *Antigone*. That opinion he gave truthfully and frankly. The sketch was crude, untaught, perhaps even audaciously unconventional. It ignored, or did not comprehend, not merely the accepted conventionalities of the art, but even some of its necessary limitations. A group in marble, modelled from this sketch, would be a failure. But there was splendid promise in the sketch. It was rich in hope and in evidence of capacity. Ralph declared with perfect earnestness that the embryo presence of something like genius revealed itself to him in the idea and even the working out of the drawing. He talked as calmly and sincerely as a man verging upon forty years of age may do to a girl scarcely past twenty.

"If I were your uncle, I would gratify your wish, and send you to study art in Rome," he said.

She shook her head simply and sadly. "I fear I shall never go," she said. "I could not well leave poor Mabel ; and besides, in good truth, Mr. Lennon, we can't afford it."

"Let me be your uncle just for this once. Let me be the wicked uncle, and banish you from your home into the wide, wide world."

"O no, that is quite impossible."

"Why ? Why may not I do anything to help anybody ?"

"You do help many ; but this, Mr. Lennon, is impossible. I don't think I should much like being helped in that way by my uncle, if I had one ; and at all events, you are not my uncle. So it can't be ; and let us not speak of it, pray. But I am deeply obliged to you, Mr. Lennon, for I know you mean what you say ; and nobody has ever been half so kind and friendly to me as you have been."

"Lennon pressed the subject no farther, but secretly resolved to approach it indirectly through Mabel or Warton. He could not but see that the life of the girl in that home was a weary one ; and as he watched it he obtained deeper and deeper insight into Walter Warton's nature. Meanwhile the correspondence between Warton's secretary and Ralph was kept up ; and as it grew, Lennon found himself sometimes glancing at a looking-glass, and wondering whether he seemed old, and wishing himself even seven or eight years younger. But he flung the thought behind him, and went to work more fiercely in cultivating his garden.

One day Lennon had been away, ranging somewhere up among the hills ; and the early sunset of spring was over before he returned. Staying a moment to look with parental pride upon the growing walls of his village, he was met by Tom Berry.

"Warton's been looking for you, Mr. Lennon, twice," said the faithful henchman.

"Indeed, Tom ; were you speaking to him ?" Ralph smiled as he asked the question, for Tom always fled with religious horror the vicinity of Warton.

"Not I ; no. Not likely. But I saw him pass up to the house ; and he came a second time. The first time he came there was a lady with him."

"Mrs. Alwyn, perhaps."

"No, no, not her ; a stranger—leastwise I never saw her before. A fine girl, too, I thought. It never surely could be his daughter—so grown up as that ?"

"No, Tom ; if it was any of his family it must have been his niece."

Warton had talked recently of bringing his niece to spend a few days with the Alwyns.

When Lennon got home, he found that Warton had left a few lines for him, expressing a wish to see him that night, as he was to leave for London early in the morning. He was to

be found at Dr. Alwyn's ; and having been twice to Lennon's, he could not well get away from his host's again that night. Would Lennon, like a good and friendly fellow, just come over and see him ?

Lennon crumpled the note, and did not go. He did not choose to intrude himself upon the Alwyns. He did not want explanations. He wished now that Grace had not come, although the first announcement of her arrival filled him with gladness. He did not like to think of her as under Mrs. Alwyn's guidance. He murmured bitterly to himself that she would probably under such circumstances hear little good of him. He was out of humour and angry like a boy.

No ; he would not go. He dined hastily, and then smoked, and then read. He read an essay by a great metaphysician on the Philosophy of the Conditioned. It failed to interest him. He glanced at the number of *Punch* just arrived. It was stupid. He pored over some accounts of workmen's wages, cost of materials, and such things ; and could not see his way into them at all. Tom Berry would have said that his mind could not "bite into them" just then. There were some plans of great improvements, which it was highly important for him to decide on—for or against ; and he could not turn the light of his attention steadily on them. He thought the room looked lonely and gaunt, more than it had ever done before.

He would go down and have a talk with Tom Berry. No ; he would not. He did not care to hear anything about Warton. Of late Tom had begun to murmur semi-articulate complaints about Warton's attentions to Mrs. Alwyn ; and Lennon wished to hear nothing of the kind.

He got up and walked out of the house. Of course he would not, could not, go to Alwyn's ; but for all that he directed his steps that way, and soon came in front of the gate.

He paced up and down in the cold March air of the raw dark night. The lights which he could see in the drawing-room window were mocking in their cheerfulness. He could not hear voices, but he could hear music. He was not wanted there by anyone, he thought ; and feeling ashamed of wandering idly round the closed doors of the house, he strode back again to his own ghostly old dwelling.

Meanwhile Grace had been anxiously expecting him all the night through, and listening for every sound which might seem

to indicate his coming. Myra, too, had in her secret heart wished that he might come, and struggled against the wish, and condemned herself for having even given it a moment's harbour. Dr. Alwyn was so vexed at Lennon's absence that he resolved to find him out next day, and ask him what on earth he meant by such unfriendly behaviour, and whether they were never to meet any more; and even Warton had reasons of his own for regretting that Lennon did not come.

But Grace looked out of her bedroom window that night vainly across the black landscape, ramparted with its serrated lines of hill, and wondered whether it was possible to see Lennon's house. For in all her life she thought she had never met any real friend but him. Perhaps the Alwyns would be her friends too, and she liked them much already; but they could not be like Mr. Lennon, even when she came to know them well.

While she was undressing, a letter dropped from her belt. It was one of Lennon's semi-official replies. She took it very tenderly, and was glancing over it when a light tap sounded at the door, and Mrs. Alwyn's voice asked permission to enter. She had come to be quite assured of her guest's comfort; and of course the two women settled down for a little final talk. At the first, Grace was burying the letter in her bosom; but Mrs. Alwyn had seen it, and involuntarily smiled; and Miss Ethelstone had indeed no thought of concealment, and had literally nothing to conceal. The smile was reflected back from Grace's eyes. It was contagious, and grew into a laugh.

"Have I surprised a secret?" said Mrs. Alwyn. "Have I broken in upon a moment of romance? Confess—and forgive me."

"No, indeed," replied Grace, laughing, but yet very earnest; "nothing of the kind. I am afraid I have not much romance in me—at least I have no time or chance to indulge in any. It's only a business letter."

"A business letter to a young lady—and the young lady hides it in her bosom! O, come, now!"

"Yes, but indeed it is. You know, Mrs. Alwyn, I am Walter's secretary."

"Yes; he told me so; but he forgot, I suppose, to mention that you put the letters of his political agent and his attorney under your pillow of nights, to dream about."

"What nonsense! I never in my life put a letter under my pillow—I suppose I never had one that absorbed my mind to any such degree. But this really is only a few short lines—on business—from Mr. Lennon. Will you read it?"

Fire flashed in Myra's dark eyes at the name—flashed suddenly, and then as suddenly went out. Miss Ethelstone held out the letter in a frank and simple way which was childlike in its truthfulness.

"My dear child, I don't want to read your letter. I was only talking nonsense purposely."

"But do read it, dear Mrs. Alwyn. Just glance over it. I should like you to do so."

Myra took it, perhaps with something like eagerness. Her hand trembled slightly. She glanced down the few lines which the letter contained. It was merely an answer to some question asked for Warton. She laid it on the table without speaking.

"I am sorry that I could not see him to-day," said Grace. "I am so fond of him."

Myra raised her eyebrows and looked surprised.

"Yes, he is so good and so friendly to us; and he takes an interest in everything one cares for; and he is so true and frank and manly. Everyone who knows him must be fond of him, I think. Don't you like him, Mrs. Alwyn?"

"I am sure Mr. Lennon is a man of high principle and generous nature, my dear; and such men are not, I suppose, very common. We must all respect them."

Miss Ethelstone looked disappointed. "You speak with a sort of reserve," she said. "Don't you like Mr. Lennon yourself—personally, I mean? Never mind about respect and high principle and all that. Dr. Alwyn likes him immensely—so he told me. I am sure you do too."

"Yes, I do like Mr. Lennon; that is, I have no doubt I should like him very much if I knew him well—and if there were no serious differences of view on some great questions which make friendship perhaps rather difficult. But I like you, my dear, for liking him, and for saying so in that frank way." She smiled.

"But why do you smile? Was there anything strange in my saying what I thought about him? Dear Mrs. Alwyn, Walter constantly tells me I speak out too plainly; and

perhaps he is sometimes right. Your smiling seems to say something of the same kind."

"No, indeed, dear—at least I meant nothing of the kind. Only girls are generally so nonsensical and affected and unreal that the frank truth comes with a quite amusing freshness."

"I should be quite ashamed of myself if I were to conceal what I thought of Mr. Lennon. But I don't exactly understand what you mean about serious differences of view making friendship rather difficult. Will you tell me?"

"Well, I don't quite know how to explain myself; but I fancy Mr. Lennon holds opinions, about religion for example, that would a little alarm one——"

Grace shook her head.

"I am sure they would not alarm *me*, Mrs. Alwyn. Mr. Lennon is so generous and true and manly that I don't think he can believe anything very dreadful. I hope I shall not frighten you if I say that I am sometimes a little tired of the talk about beliefs and religious professions and all that. There is some story or anecdote I read somewhere, about the Athenians knowing what politeness was and the Spartans practising it. Now I think, in the matter of religion, Mr. Lennon is somewhat of the Spartan kind. I think he practises it—I do indeed."

"You are quite eloquent about him, Grace."

"Because I want to convince you, and to make you see him as I do."

"Why, dear?"

"I want you to like him just in the same way as I do—and I don't think you feel to him in the same way."

Myra smiled rather sadly.

"No, Grace; perhaps not."

"Indeed, I fear you are not quite, quite frank with me. I think there is something behind in your thoughts which you don't think it right to show me. I fear, Mrs. Alwyn, that you don't like Mr. Lennon at all; and that very much surprises me, for I cannot think you are so strict in dogmatic views as you give yourself out to be; and you seem to me just the woman who ought to appreciate him and to like him."

"One thing I shall be frank about—I like *you*."

And Myra kissed her guest affectionately and bade her good-night.

"She can hardly be in love with him," thought Mrs. Alwyn.

"No girl in love speaks in that calm, open way. O Heaven forgive us for our secret, selfish thoughts, which we dare not bring into the light, and yet which God reads! If I could only speak as she does! But if God sees my weakness, He also sees my condemnation of myself and my resolve to conquer all in His name."

"There is something strange in her reserve about Mr. Lenon," thought Miss Ethelstone when alone. "I fear she does not like him; and I am sorry, for I am afraid I could not love anyone who did not like him. How strange! She seems to me to have a fine nature, and some brains too—for a woman. How can it be that she fails to appreciate *him*?"

CHAPTER XV

VISITORS TO RALPH.

GRACE ETHELSTONE much enjoyed the first few hours of her visit to Mrs. Alwyn. The mere novelty of the thing was of course very pleasant; but it had other delights for her than that of mere novelty. It was a glimpse of freedom from small and wearisome cares; it was the breathing of a pure, warm, and luxurious atmosphere, after gray skies and constant chilly wind. Dreadfully fagging even to the young, with hope all splendid and vague before them, is the incessant business of making two ends meet which utmost endeavour can hardly persuade to come together. When at the end of the week the stone has been heavily rolled to the top of the hill, down it crashes again straightway, and the Monday morning begins the upward labour afresh.

Things had of late been growing worse and worse in Warton's house. Money was more scarce; everything that had to be bought was dearer; bills were running up faster and faster. The process of reducing expenses had become a hopeless, pinching operation, there really was so little that could be reduced. Warton came home rather less frequently than before, and only answered letters full of practical difficulties with fine words of hope and promise. All the burden fell upon Grace; for she had spirit and brains, while poor Mabel could only meet difficulties by crying, and going to bed and saying

her prayers until she fell asleep. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, the landlord, the gas-company's collector, the water-rate collector, the poor-rate collector, the man for her Majesty's taxes,—all these had to be encountered and put off or otherwise disposed of; and they every one came to know Grace's face and name, and to have quite a sort of acquaintance with her from frequent conference. Her own little money, which she received quarterly, generally melted away in a very few days, and went but a very short way at best. And if the children and Mabel and herself were not elegantly dressed when Walter happened to come, his sensitive nerves and fine feelings were quite discomposed, and he looked as disappointed, displeased, and martyr-like as if he had been lavishing money and care on the household in vain. Indeed, it was a weary and thankless life for Grace Ethelstone; and there were times when only the womanly difficulty of suddenly severing the bonds of habit prevented her from shaking the dust from her feet and going out into the free world.

Therefore she was glad to be invited to Alwyn's; glad to be pressed, and indeed forced, by Walter and Mabel to go—Walter having reasons of his own, and Mabel doing as she was bidden; glad to be away from the weary house for a few days, although she felt a pang at parting with the children; glad to be in a place where she was waited on, and had nothing to do—where she never heard anything about the providing of dinner, or had any hand in its preliminary arrangements, but merely sat and dined when the time came; glad—O, so glad!—when she waked in the morning, to think that she had no household difficulties to encounter, no bills to receive, and no duns to meet. The bright well-ordered home of the Alwyns, where there was no ostentation to alarm one and no formality to repel, was delightful and refreshing to her. Dr. Alwyn was a finer man of the paternal order than she had ever seen before; and Mrs. Alwyn was a charming, appreciative, intelligent woman; and life went on so actively, so vividly, and yet so smoothly. It was very happy and full of promise—at first.

But she expected to find Mr. Lennon a frequent, a daily visitor; and much of her expectation of happiness lay in the hope of often seeing him. Mrs. Alwyn's rooms were heaped with handsome illustrated books and costly prints, and fine photographs and Parian figures, and other such art-treasures; and Grace would so much have liked Mr. Lennon to help her

to appreciate all these things, and talk to her about them. Doré's wonderful depths of darkness and flashes of bright sky; Millais's lank and long-limbed women; Frith's pretty, microscopic, and emasculate reductions of Hogarth to Victorian scale; grand photographs of Cleopatras and Madonnas from Louvre and Dresden gallery; engravings from glorious and now immortal John Phillip's Spanish scenes, and from the melancholy and colourless beauty of Scheffer's groups; the pure nakedness of Ingres' *Source*; and the sensual strength of Gerome's imperial forms—all these were to Grace as tempting as the magic fruits in the garden beneath the earth to Aladdin, the poor tailor's boy. But she wanted some one to talk to her about them; and Dr. Alwyn knew so little about art that he made the most absurd mistakes, over which he and she were fain to laugh; and though Mrs. Alwyn was clever and knew a good deal about them, yet somehow she did not seem to care to talk much over them,—they were all so old to her, no doubt. And she had evidently no great opinion of Mr. Lennon's judgment; for if Grace happened to speak of some painting or statue which he particularly admired, Mrs. Alwyn invariably changed the subject, and introduced some other work of art.

The second day passed, and Lennon did not come. He was indeed cultivating his garden very assiduously at the other side of the broad dim lake, and smoking with a fierce, almost passionate energy, and wondering why on earth he was less happy now than a week ago.

Grace hoped and wished and expected that he would come all the day and evening and night, and he never came. It would be wrong to say that she did not sleep all that night. Only very great heroines in splendid romances lie awake literally all night. But she remained awake a considerable time, and felt vexed, disappointed, and anxious; and when she rose next morning the sense of relief from butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker, from Mabel's tears and the maid's stupidity, did not seem nearly so delicious as on the previous morning.

"Do you think, Mrs. Alwyn, that anything can have happened to Mr. Lennon—anything sudden or bad?" she asked of her hostess that morning after breakfast, and when Dr. Alwyn had taken himself off to his study to attempt another half-page of the slowly-progressing *Flora*.

"No, dear; I am sure nothing of the kind has happened to him. Why did you think of such a thing?"

"Because it is so strange, so very strange, his not coming to see me. Don't you think it strange?"

"Yes, perhaps it is; but he is much occupied, you know, and perhaps he means to come to-day."

"But I thought he would have come at once; it is so unlike him not to come! If he only came to London for a few hours he always ran down by train to see me—to see us; and this is so near him—and, my dear Mrs. Alwyn, so much a pleasanter place than ours. And he likes you so much. O yes, he often told me so."

Mrs. Alwyn seemed to have heard a noise on the lawn; for she suddenly turned and looked out of the window fixedly. After a moment she resumed the conversation:

"Do you know, Miss Ethelstone—"

"O don't, please! everyone calls me Grace. Mr. Lennon always does, though he was rather shy and distant at first. I told him to call me by my name. If I like anyone, man or woman, I like them to call me by my name," said Grace, with pardonable confusion as to grammar. She ought to have said, of course, "I like him or her to call me by my name;" but she did as most of us do in such a case, and committed an error.

"Well then, Grace—I am sure I like best to call you Grace—I had some idea—I don't know what first made me think of it—that Mr. Lennon was or had been an admirer, at one time, of your aunt, Mrs. Warton."

"Yes; and so he was! It is quite true, though you would never think it now. It was long ago—a dozen years or more, I believe. He would have married her; but she would not have him—and—" Grace smiled and stopped—"I don't think he is very sorry for it now. Mabel is one of the sweetest and best women I ever knew. Indeed, Mrs. Alwyn, she has no positive faults at all. She is as simple and good as a little child. But I don't think any man could much care about her. Mr. Lennon would do anything for her, I am sure, and is very fond of her; but, O, I don't think he is sorry that she did not marry him."

"I daresay not," thought Myra; and she kept back a sigh.

"Don't you think I had better go to see him, Mrs. Alwyn?" Grace asked.

"To see him, dear? To see Mr. Lennon?"

"Yes. I am so anxious about him. There must be some reason for his not coming, and I must go to see him. It is

not far, and I can easily find the way, for I suppose *you* could not come. But if you could and would it would be so good of you ; and I should be so glad ; and so would he too."

"But, Grace, would it not be rather odd, you going to see Mr. Lennon?"

"Would it? O, surely not. Why, he is our best friend in the world. I do believe he is Mabel's only friend. But even if it would be odd, I don't mind. *He* won't think it odd, I am sure. I know that Dr. Alwyn and you are above such nonsense ; and there is nobody else here who knows or cares anything about me."

Myra thought for a moment, and then said,

"Well, dear, if you really have made up your mind to go to see Mr. Lennon—"

"Indeed I have."

"Then I'll ask Dr. Alwyn to go with you. We can't have you going all alone, to get lost in the hills, or fall into the lake, or something of that kind."

"You are very kind to me ; but could *you* not come yourself? That would be so pleasant."

"No, dear ; I am very sorry, but I cannot go, and I am afraid it would not be thought quite the thing even for two ladies to go out paying visits to their bachelor friends. We are rather strong on the proprieties here, Grace ; terribly provincial and puritanical, in fact. But Dr. Alwyn will gladly go with you. Indeed, the excuse will be very welcome to him, for Mr. Lennon is an especial favourite of his."

"But his work—his book, which he seems so fond of, and so anxious to finish?"

"Alas, I fear that book will never see public eye, or even publisher's eye. There is not a day that somebody's difficulty or grief or joy does not postpone it. Don't make any apology on that subject, my dear. There is not an old woman in the parish for whose sake Dr. Alwyn has not put that work aside ; it cannot be any grief to him to lay it down for once for a pretty young woman."

Cheerily indeed did the clergyman accept the task and lay down his pen. He had written nearly half a page that day, and had hoped to do more ; but what did it matter? Old Dame Trot or Mother Hubbard would assuredly have presently claimed his time if Grace Ethelstone had not bespoken it.

Miss Ethelstone liked to walk ; and they had a very pleasant walk round the lake. There was a ferry to cross ; but if one had time to stroll round the margin of the lake, it was a far more delightful way of reaching the other side. The day was singularly bright and genial for a North-of-England spring ; and the east wind, which is such an abiding joy everywhere north of the Humber and the Mersey, was not breathing on this favoured morning. Grace felt very happy, hopeful, and free. The spring entered her veins. Dr. Alwyn was a genial companion ; just the fine, gray-haired, dignified, manly form that sets off better than anything save masculine youth the figure of a graceful leaning girl. He talked charmingly of the place, its scenery, its associations, its flowers and trees. He was one of the few men who could talk to a woman about Nature and trees and science without boring her.

They passed the unfinished rows of Lennon's cottages, and saw the workmen busy. Grace was much interested in hearing of the project, and looking at the houses, which were progressing fast towards completion. Dr. Alwyn was surprised to find that she had never heard of the scheme before.

"Yes, it is strange ; but then Mr. Lennon so seldom talks about himself."

"But Mr. Warton, I thought, might have told you ?"

"Mr. Warton," Grace was on the point of saying, "seldom talks about anything but himself." But she checked herself and said nothing.

Ralph was not anywhere in the neighbourhood of the cottages. They went towards his house. It looked lonely, stern, and sad.

"What a picturesque and mournful old place !" said Miss Ethelstone. "It looks as if there ought to be some grim old story haunting it. Indeed it ought to have a ghost. Has it a ghost, Dr. Alwyn ? Does any dim white form float over that dreary garden of nights, and wail at the windows ?"

"No, I don't think so. At least I have never heard ; and we are all so superstitious down here that the faintest suspicion of a ghost runs everywhere, like a report of the breaking out of cholera. I think I may pronounce Lennon's house unsuspect. I can't get rid of superstition here, Miss Ethelstone, charm I never so wisely."

"O, don't try any more. Superstition is popular poetry. Please don't exorcise it."

They opened the gate and went in.

"Now, if Mr. Lennon is not in," said Grace, "I shall be so disappointed."

Dr. Alwyn knocked at the heavy door, and spoke no word. He would have been relieved if it turned out that Lennon was not at home. He was conscious of a sort of desertion of his friend lately—his friend whom yet he so much liked. He had of course noticed Lennon's marked and continued absence; and he had not of late gone to see him—had not persevered in his purpose of talking frankly with him about the cause of the unexplained estrangement. He felt within himself that his wife had quietly, silently prevailed. Manhood had, as usual, made brave resolutions never to surrender, and after all had lowered its flag and yielded to the pertinacious, irresistible, pitiless petticoat. Was it not the late Madame de Girardin who epitomised society in her description of the place where every man was governed by his wife but one, and he was governed by another man's wife? Dr. Alwyn felt that he had become a party to something like a desertion of his friend's cause, and he was a little embarrassed about meeting the friend just now.

Ralph was in, had seen them, and came himself to the door, striding past the aged Mrs. Beck's slower movements.

The visitors came into his library, the only decently furnished room in the house; and even here was hardly a chair which a lady might fearlessly sit on who cared about the spotlessness of her dress. The room was confusedly full of books and papers and plans; and had a gun hung up, and a revolver and other pistols lying about; and the lion's skin which Watty so longed to see, and on which Grace's eyes fell the moment she entered the room; and there were huge boots, suited for an Australian, standing boldly up in a corner near the fire; and there were globes and a telescope and a quadrant; and there stood gleaming in whiteness and serene beauty, amid all the confusion and débris and pell-mell incongruity, a small marble copy of Thorwaldsen's Night.

The greeting was very cordial, and the sweet, clear, joyous tones of a girl's voice sounded wonderfully strange and musical in the sad old dusty place. An Italian sky could not have gladdened a landscape more than Grace's words made bright the atmosphere of the place Ralph Lennon called his home.

But the conversation did not get on well except for the part she took in it. Between the two men there was a dim inarticulate feeling which rose up like a film or a screen. Neither could be thoroughly frank. Each knew that the other was conscious of the difficulty.

The visitors at last rose to return.

"We saw your walls rising as we came along," said Dr. Alwyn; "your building operations seem to get on very rapidly."

"Yes; we keep at them, Tom Berry and I. We keep pegging away, and they do get on somehow."

"Come and show them to us yourself, Mr. Lennon," said Grace, "and explain all about the whole affair. You never told me a word of it before, which was not very friendly."

"There was nothing to tell, Grace. The building up of a few walls would hardly interest you, two hundred and odd miles away. But I shall be very glad indeed to walk down with you and trot out my hobby, until you have had enough of its paces.

So they walked down to the model village, and Ralph explained all that he meant to do, but rather hurriedly or carelessly—not perhaps as he would have done if Grace and he had been alone. He slurred over many points; and he never allowed a gleam of enthusiasm to break over the recital. Miss Ethelstone was somewhat puzzled, and looked so.

"Perhaps I don't make myself quite understood?" he said, in answer to the expression in her face.

Dr. Alwyn had just at this moment entered one of the nearly-finished houses.

"Yes; O yes—I quite understand all that you say; but there is something I don't understand."

"What is that, Miss Ethelstone?"

"Yourself, Mr. Lennon."

"Why! How? What is your difficulty?"

"I don't know. You don't seem like yourself down here. You talk so coolly, and so strangely. I can't explain it; but you are not the same being at all that we see you in our place. Why do you live in that sad and lonely old house?"

Lennon laughed.

"Well, it is rather a grim and ghostly old place, I dare say; and I make no doubt it looks unbearable, almost uninhabitable, to a stranger; but it suits me very well, Grace. I am used

to it, you know. I was born there, and lived there a great many years—some of them very happy years too ; and I don't dislike it ; in fact I like it much. An ill-favoured thing, but mine own. And then, as to being lonely, why, I dare say I should be lonely anywhere. I feel dreadfully alone when I go to the Eleanor's cross hotel in London, and have to be put into a back bed-room six flights up, because the place is so full."

"Yes ; but I don't mean that. You don't know anybody in the Eleanor's-cross hotel—"

"Pardon me ; I do. One of the waiters is an especial friend of mine. I have found out that he is a terribly discontented man, who thinks the order of things is fearfully warped. He has a settled dislike to all the institutions of his country, including, I believe, the Throne and the Altar : and we commune together, and mingle our griefs."

"Nonsense ! But you do know people here ; and why don't you go to see them ? Why do you live like an anchorite, or an Eastern saint ?"

"I know very few people here, Grace ; very few indeed. I am not a sociable or convivial personage ; and I don't care about my fellow-man."

"No ! and yet you are taking all this trouble to do some good to your fellow-man ! But just now I was not thinking about your fellow-man in general, only of people whom you know. And I, who am not your fellow-man, have a grievance of my own. Why didn't you come to see me ?"

"I ought to have done so ; but there were difficulties which I don't care to trouble you by explaining—"

"Because you think I have not sense enough to understand them ?"

"Indeed for no such reason. But they are not all mine to tell. I ought to have gone to see you before now ; but I counted on seeing you somehow."

"I am glad you did. I should be sorry, Mr. Lennon, if you thought me ungrateful and—and stupid enough not to care about seeing you ; for I have not so many friends that I could afford to neglect one of them—the best of them : so I was coming to see you to-day all alone, only Mrs. Alwyn sent her kind and dear husband with me to take care of me."

The kind and dear husband now made his appearance.

"You are going to have quite a Phalanstery here, Lennon. I suppose this largest building is meant for schools ?"

"Yes. We are going to have a boys' and a girls' school ; and men and women, I hope, will learn there too."

"Who is going to teach?"

"Well the fact is, we'll all teach as best we can."

"That is, I suppose, *you* will teach?"

"Not I alone, or especially. Everybody who knows anything shall teach what he or she knows. Among the whole, I daresay we all shall teach and learn something."

Alwyn smiled. Teaching of that sort seemed to him education for Colney Hatch.

"Mutual improvement," he remarked. "One man discoursing of what he doesn't understand to others who don't understand him, eh?"

"Nothing of the sort," replied Lennon, with imperturbable good-humour ; "that is the established system of teaching. The teacher is supposed to know everything, which means that he knows nothing. Ours shall be true education. Suppose you come here and teach us the Greek grammar. Very good ; that *you* understand, and we don't ; so we are glad to be taught by you. But in return Tom Berry gives you, who have become in your turn a student with us, some lessons in practical geometry and mensuration, which I am sure you don't now understand half as well as he does."

"And you yourself? What is your department of instruction?"

"O, anything that comes in my way. Let us say geography, for example. I can describe what a mountain is like, or a tropical climate, or an Australian goldfield."

"And the girls, I suppose, teach you all how to mend stockings and rock cradles, as their contribution to the new scheme of complete and practical education?"

"No ; the girls we are rather puzzled about just yet ; we don't quite see our way, my 'mate' Tom Berry and I. We rather avoid that part of the scheme just at present."

"O, you can't be without a regular teacher for the girls," broke in Grace, decisively. "There is nothing *you* could induce them to learn ; and they have nothing to teach. I wish I might come and settle down here, and become mistress-in-chief of the girls' school. I don't know anything myself, but I daresay I could learn. By rising early, and always keeping a lesson or two ahead, I get on very well with the children at home. Do engage me, Mr. Lennon."

"I don't want to discourage you, Lennon," said Dr. Alwyn; "but your scheme seems to me likely to come to dismal failure. My dear fellow, you cannot remodel our canny Cumberland lads and lasses, and make them into disciples of Louis Blanc, or Brook-Farm followers of Margaret Fuller."

"Yet don't give up, Mr. Lennon," said Grace, boldly. "Indeed, I need not advise you, for I know you will not give up; and my advice in any case is worth nothing. You will gain at least gratitude by your effort."

"I doubt it," Dr. Alwyn rejoined, rather sadly; "I never heard of anybody who earned gratitude by trying to persuade people to be good or happy in any way but their own."

"You talk to me in this way," Lennon said,—"you who spend three-fourths of all your time, and I don't know what proportion of your income, in trying to make the people round you good and happy!—There is a preacher for you, Miss Ethelstone, who points his friends the prudent and selfish way, and always walks the other road himself! Would you believe it, Grace? there is not an improvident family for miles round that this rigid political economist has not counselled, helped, and relieved; and even if all be in vain to-day, they will come upon him again to-morrow, and he will lecture them gravely on their wickedness and folly, and open his purse and give them another chance."

"I could believe anything of both of you," said Grace, with an inexplicable moisture gleaming in her eyes; "anything in the way of goodness."

"Anything in the way of absurdity would be better, perhaps," Dr. Alwyn said. "Come, Miss Ethelstone, we must leave our Communist philosopher and go.—Good-bye, Lennon, until we meet again. I wish you every manner of luck with your scheme; but I don't hope for it. You are impervious to the dictates of common sense—and selfishness."

He wrung Lennon's hand with a warm and manly grasp; and the film which had risen between the two was scattered for the moment, and each saw clearly the true heart of the other.

"But when shall I see you again, Mr. Lennon?" asked Grace. "I have never heard anything from you about my sketch; and I want to talk to you."

"You shall come as often as you please, Miss Ethelstone," said the Rector; "if—if Mr. Lennon is too much engaged to

come our way, we must only walk down here and find him."

"I do so wish Mr. Lennon were my uncle," said Grace, frankly to Dr. Alwyn, as they lost sight of the Phalanstery and turned homeward.

"Do you?" he asked somewhat emphatically; and he looked with an expression of good-humoured curiosity into her clear candid eyes. They met his inquiry with unclouded sincerity.

"O, yes; I should like it of all things. He has so fine a nature, and he is so kind; and he is fond of me. I wish he were my uncle—or I wish far more that he were my father. But he is not old enough for that."

"No. Is not that a pity?"

But she did not answer that question so readily, and Dr. Alwyn was left to infer that on the whole she did not wish Ralph Lennon to be any nearer to the patriarchal age than he was.

It is almost a literal truth to say that Grace Ethelstone had never known until within the last twelve months any man but Walter Warton. Her father she hardly remembered; she had no brother. She was a little girl when she used to sit on Warton's knee, and thought him splendid in beauty and virtue; and it was only when, after her mother's death, she came to live under the roof which was nominally his that she began to see him truly. Then she assumed that all men were more or less of the same mould; that their intellects and their pursuits made them contemptuous of women; that they were ardent to get away from their wives and slow to return; that between the two there was only at best—and that when the woman was very loving and docile—something of the sort of companionship which exists between man and the dog that lies on the hearth-rug at his feet. She accepted the condition of things as an inevitable decree of the ruling powers; but accepted it with a blending of contempt for her own sex and hostility towards the other. Accepting Walter Warton as the type of the latter, she took Mabel for an exemplar of the former; and she was hardly more inclined to blame the men than to despise the women. Ralph Lennon was the first man who treated her like a rational being and like a friend; and she therefore felt drawn towards him even from the beginning. It was delightful to her to meet with such men as Lennon and

Dr. Alwyn. As she walked home, leaning on the arm of the latter, she somewhat modified the wish she had just been expressing. She thought nothing could be more delightful than to have Dr. Alwyn for a father, or even an uncle, and Mr. Lennon for a brother.

CHAPTER XVI.

REVEALED.

MANY days after that day Grace Ethelstone walked round by the lake towards the Phalanstery ; and she walked thither alone : for Mrs. Alwyn had constant occupation, and Grace would not be the cause of always disturbing Dr. Alwyn from the culture of the Flora. And she always met Ralph Lennon, and they walked together for a little—perhaps by the lake, perhaps among the cottages ; and they were both frankly, unaffectedly happy in these meetings, which were unconcealed, open, and so far only friendly. And the days thus ran on ; and the visit drew to a close.

One day Lennon was looking after his work as usual, and had not yet begun even to glance in the direction of the lake ; for it was much earlier than the time when Grace generally walked that way. But happening to look upward, he was aware, as the old ballads have it, of a figure now very familiar to him, and which came rather slowly and hesitatingly towards him. He strode to meet her. It was Grace ; but she was not in her usual spirits, and, indeed, talked with difficulty and evident uneasiness.

Men naturally shy, like Lennon, always approach any difficult question—when they do approach it—with surprising directness and suddenness.

“Something has happened to you, Grace,” he said ; “tell me what it is.”

“Nothing very remarkable, Mr. Lennon. Nothing worth speaking of.”

“But do tell me. You are unhappy ?”

“Yes, I am.” She turned her clear eyes sadly on him, and Ralph could not but see that they had lately been swimming in tears.

"Will you not tell me the cause? Can I do anything? Have you heard any bad news from home?"

"No; not bad news of that sort. I mean not deaths or sickness; but poor Mabel and the children! O, I am so sorry for them—and I ought not to be here!"

"My dear child, do tell me what has happened; perhaps I can give you advice or help of some kind."

"Indeed I am ashamed to tell you; and I know I ought not to tell it to you; but I have no one to confide in except you. I can't talk to Mrs. Alwyn about it, though she is a woman, and so sweet and kind; but she does not know anything about us—and you have known us always—and indeed I daresay," she said, flashing up to warmth, "it will be little new to you after all, when you hear it. Mr. Lennon, we are dreadfully poor, as you know; and now Mabel is in some terrible fix or other about money; and Walter hasn't any; and I don't know what isn't going to happen—and the poor children—and she's written me such a letter all about it—and there—read it, please; I can't say any more." And Grace fairly broke down in tears, and perhaps on the whole felt relieved that the worst was over—that the agony of exposure she had fought against had fairly conquered, and that there was nothing for it but to cover her vanquished face with her handkerchief.

Lennon took the letter, very much relieved indeed as to the nature of the trouble, but greatly distressed to see her grief. His impulse was to put his arms in brotherly fashion round the poor girl, and kiss her and beg of her not to cry; and it would not perhaps have been very wrong even if he had done so; but he did not obey the impulse. He turned the letter in his hand, hesitatingly and rather awkwardly.

"My dear Grace, don't give way so. It's all nothing—a trifling affair, I am sure, not worth your thinking about; and it can easily be set right. Do you really wish me to read this letter?"

"Yes, please;" with a half-impatient gesture. He read the letter: it was short, not very coherent, blotted here and there, written under excitement enough easily to overthrow poor Mabel's self-command; but it was not a very huge business. Somebody wanted two hundred pounds, and if the amount were not paid within a few days, execution must follow; and Walter was away, Mabel did not even know where; and it would be such a dreadful thing for him—such an exposure when he came back.

"Is that all?" asked Ralph.

"Yes; that's all, for the present. Isn't that enough?" She had had her flood of tears now, and was reviving; and she sent back something like a faint smile in response to his.

"Well, it's not a very dreadful business. Walter is away; and Mabel, of course, can't get at the money until he comes back—"

She stole a side-look at his face to see if there was anything of doubt expressed in it; but his countenance was imperturbably calm—apparently he had the fullest confidence in Warton's personal solvency.

"And, of course, in the mean time, all Mabel has to do is to ask any of her friends to advance her the money. Walter can't be angry with her for doing so when he knows that the demand came suddenly on her; and ladies don't keep hundreds of pounds ready in their work-boxes or desks. Any friend whatever will advance her the money; I daresay she has received it by this time; but, perhaps, just to make all sure, it would be as well if I were to give you the amount. It's only writing a cheque, and you can send it."

The framing of this speech was in Lennon's mind a master-stroke of diplomacy. The cool easy way of treating the whole thing as a little difficulty only caused by Walter Warton's temporary absence; the calm assumption that hosts of friends were ready to supply the momentary deficiency; and the careless suggestion at the close that it might be well, just to make security doubly sure, that he should also give the money—all this was magnificently contrived to take away the slightest appearance of conferring an obligation. Perhaps it was only too well contrived; perhaps the preternatural coolness and carelessness were too much. Certainly Grace already began to feel ashamed, and was penitent for having so freely exposed the petty humiliating secrets of the poverty that surrounded her house. She crimsoned at the thought that she had perhaps opened herself to the suspicion of having made an indirect appeal to Lennon for money; she was so much confused and embarrassed that she could not speak a word.

Meanwhile Lennon, wholly unconscious of this, and indeed happy in the thought that his careless and business-like deportment had made exactly the impression he wanted to produce, was quietly and with sidelong glances investigating the contents of his pocket-book, in which he had that very morning stowed

away some bank-notes. He found that he had enough of those papers for his purpose ; and he crumpled them in his hand, and seized his opportunity.

"Perhaps, Grace, now that I think of it, it may be as well to save Mrs. Warton the trouble of dealing with a cheque ; ladies don't always quite understand these matters—and I happen now to have a note or two here—and if you will just enclose these to her when you write ; and I am going to town next week myself, and we can settle the whole affair." He endeavoured to put the crumpled papers into her hand ; but she drew back.

"O don't, Mr. Lennon ; please don't ask me. You are very kind ; but don't ask me."

"Why not, Grace ?"

"Because it pains and shames me, and shows me how wrong and thoughtless it was of me to have exposed poor Mabel's poverty at all."

"There is nothing to be ashamed of ; and I don't think it can be called exposure to confide in a very old and, believe me, a very true friend."

"Yes ; but when I confided it to you, I never thought you would suppose I was begging for—for help."

"For shame ! How can you talk so ? how can you suppose I ever thought anything of the kind ? Begging for help ! Would you not ask me to stretch out my hand if you wished to be helped across that brook there ? My dear child, you make this nonsensical affair far too serious. What possible reason can there be why Mrs. Warton should not accept a momentary helping hand from me just at this moment, or why you should interpose to prevent it ? Come, Grace, do be a rational girl, and oblige me."

"O don't, Mr. Lennon ; don't ask me, don't press me. I cannot and will not do it. Don't make me feel our poverty yet more bitter and humiliating than before."

"You have not a friend on earth who would go farther or do more to save you from one moment of bitterness or humiliation than I would. You misunderstand me wilfully, Grace."

"Indeed, indeed I do not."

"Then why make an obligation and a humiliation, and what not, out of the offer of a temporary loan of this trifle, this trash ? Do you think a man would thus reject the helping hand of a friend ?"

"I don't know, Mr. Lennon ; but I cannot take it. It only pains me to think of it, and makes me feel I have done something wrong and unwomanly, perhaps, when I spoke of the affair at all."

"Then you will not let me help you?"

"Ah, no—I cannot."

They were crossing a little bridge of rude planks which spanned a stream that rippled musically enough in summer, but now rushed a roaring torrent down from some source in a mountain cleft to the calm lake. Yielding to an impulse of vexation, Lennon crushed the rejected notes in his hand, and tossed the little paper ball into the torrent, which soon swept it away. Instantly he felt ashamed of his boyish and foolish petulance, and hoped the girl at his side had not seen his action. But she had.

"O, Mr. Lennon, what a shame, and what a sin ! That might have made ever so many poor families happy."

"Well, Grace, I confess that I am rather ashamed of my display of petulance ; and I am sorry to have been detected, at all events, which is as far an advance on the way to penitence as some of us ever get. But I repudiate the sin ; and I transfer its responsibility all to your shoulders. Why did you make me angry, child, with your absurd punctiliousness and unfriendly nonsense?"

"Are you angry, really ; and did I offend you?"

"No, you didn't offend me ; but I am angry, very angry."

She looked seriously into his face.

"Well, I think you are angry. I never thought you could be. I did not suppose anything ever disturbed you. But I hope you will forgive me. You know—you must know I did not mean to vex you, or to be unfriendly. But, Mr. Lennon, I could not act otherwise. You must leave me the delight of being independent—yes, independent even of *you*."

She laid her hand upon his, timidly and conciliatingly. Ralph looked down at the fair face with its frank and noble expression, childlike in its confiding, intelligent simplicity, and the bright eyes, in which still glittered a tear. All his vexation vanished, and a deep breath of new emotion swept over his heart. He stooped, and kissed her cheek. It was done without thought, without intention ; the result of a sudden and uncontrollable impulse. But that kiss closed all the volume of his old life ;

and, for joy or sorrow, a new chapter of existence opened to him that moment.

As for Grace, she blushed a little, but did not start or draw back; indeed, she had no time to draw back, or express surprise, or anger, or anything. She took the kiss innocently, and seemed to regard it as a brotherly seal of forgiveness.

"Now I am forgiven," she said, "and I am happy again; but I must stay no longer. I am going back to-morrow; I must go back, indeed, for Mabel will be lonely and disturbed; and I have remained much longer than I ever intended—and in truth I have been so very happy here that I am not so anxious to go back as I ought to be. I shall not see you again—this time; but you said you are soon to be in town?"

"Soon?" He spoke in rather a *distract* tone. "Oh yes, very soon. I am going up in a day or two."

"And you will come to see us?"

"Yes, without fail."

"Good-bye, Mr. Lennon."

"Good-bye, Grace." He held her hand in his a moment, irresolutely. Some words seemed to be trembling on his lips. But they remained unspoken. He raised his hat. She turned and walked rapidly away. He still remained upon the spot where they had stood. As she reached a corner of the road she turned and looked back. He saw her, and signalled a farewell. Then she disappeared; but he still remained motionless.

He remained there for many minutes, during which he saw neither the sky nor the sun, nor the water that rushed and sparkled at his feet. One thought, one form rose between him and the light, and filled up for the moment his whole horizon. A fierce wild joy, like a rushing wind, swept through him, and, having raved and raged for a few moments, died out and left the rugged surface of his nature a desert as before. For he knew that he loved the girl who had just left him; and first recognition of a new passion in any strong nature is always a joy and an exultation. At least, the solitude that is called peace was closed in storm of some kind; the long, long canker of peace was over and done. The volcanic fire of man's deepest affection had not burnt itself out in him, as lately he had thought. The soul had re-entered the sepulchre; the dead had arisen. Ralph Lennon exulted in the glow of his newly-revived emotion, in the surviving strength and energy of his

passion, as Dumas's prisoner of the Château d'If rejoiced when he tested the strength he was about to use in freedom, and found that even fourteen years of a dungeon under the sea had not worn it wholly away. True, the reaction came, and Lennon looked face to face upon himself—upon his eight-and-thirty years or more, upon his life, wasted first in pleasure that brought no happiness, and next in labour that gave no content; and he thought of the bright youth, the childlike simplicity, the fresh, free, unworn intelligence of the girl he could not but love; and he asked himself how it was possible that such a love could end in anything but barrenness and disappointment. How could *she* love him? And if she could, or if in her heedless youth she could be brought to fancy that she did, would it not be a rash and selfish and cruel thing to accept such a sacrifice from one who now could hardly appreciate its value?

Unconsciously he flung his hand into the air, as if he would toss the whole subject from him—scatter the whole dream; and he strode back to his Phalanstery. Often he worked there with his own hands, taking lessons from Tom Berry in carpentering, from some one else in mason's work, and so on; not always, perhaps, forwarding very decidedly the object of progress, and certainly not often quite delighting the professional workers by his coöperation. This day he toiled away at one thing and another until his face was all grime and his clothes were all lime and shavings; and when night came he tramped some miles up one of the passes in the hills, and wandered about, and lost himself, and found the track again, and got home long after midnight, and smoked and read until near the dawn, and then slept heavily until noon had fully come. And through all the working, walking, reading, sleeping, the common, vain, immemorial regret ran through his sense and soul like a sad symphony—the regret for youth, the youth which would at least have made him less unfit for her whom now he knew that he loved.

And she? After she had left him and gone a little way she looked back, as we have said, and saw him. When she had rounded the curve of the road she paused, looked both ways, saw that no one was near, and then came back to the corner again and cast her eyes to where Lennon still stood. But he was not looking that way. He was listlessly gazing at the water beneath his feet. She remained there still, and presently

she saw him go away ; and he had never once looked in the direction she had taken. So she went on her way, cheating, or trying to cheat herself, as people will, into the belief that she was very glad he had not looked, lest he might have seen her ; and thus endeavouring to silence the inner craving voice that moaned, "Why did he not look?" and answered, "Because he was not thinking of me." For though the sensation which began of late days more and more to fill Grace Ethelstone's heart was wholly, absolutely strange and new to her, its strangeness did not deceive her ; nay, that very strangeness announced its real nature and spoke its name. It was as new and strange, and yet as impossible to misunderstand, as that other new and strange throb which the young wife feels beneath her bosom, and which she cannot fail to know. Men and women apparently in full health, a moment ago unconscious of any inner and fatal weakness, have sometimes felt a strange, wonderful, ineffable pang of unknown pain thrill through them, and gasping for utterance have said, "This is death ; I am going to die !" and so died. Love and death have from time out of mind been objects of comparison and contrast. They bear this other resemblance, that their coming is least likely to be misunderstood when the feelings that announce it are most new and strange to the invaded heart.

So Grace Ethelstone knew that what she felt towards Lennon was love, and nothing else. But she believed that he cared for her only as a friend—as he might care for a boy. She did not think that in his broad, robust, and masculine nature,—enlightened by so many experiences and so much culture, haunted by the shades of so much suffering, and cheered by so many definite and practical objects, schemes, and hopes,—her small individuality could fill up much space. Had he looked back that time and seen her, Heaven knows what womanly hope and pride it might have caused to burn within her ; but now she mentally vowed that she never expected anything of the kind, and could not be brought to believe in it. Tears were in her eyes as she hastened home, and she dreaded to meet any one on the way. Yet on the whole she might almost be called happy. She had found her hero, whom she could worship in secret ; and the life of a woman is a blank until she has found her hero. As in the charming German story which we all know and admire, the soul only seems to enter the frame of woman through the magical inspiration caught by contact with

some nature which she believes heroic, and yearns to and loves. "I must go back," thought poor Grace, "to my dull place, and my efforts to encourage Mabel, and my struggles and shifts; and I have no one to speak to of what I feel, and I shall probably never come here any more. But I shall see him sometimes; and at least he will think of me as a friend, and he will encourage me in my own path—and that is all."

Mrs. Alwyn saw her cross the lawn, and noted her downcast eyes, her heightened colour, her hurrying step; and she instinctively avoided meeting her guest just then. She went into her own room, and knelt and prayed, and wept perhaps, and flamed in silent anger against herself, and started like a surprised criminal when she heard her husband's genial mellow voice below. At last she schooled and conquered herself, and came downstairs all brightness, warmth, and affection.

CHAPTER XVII.

"LENNON'S FOLLY."

AS the model village began to become at last an accomplished fact, Lennon's difficulties with his neighbours became greater and greater. Mere difficulty in setting the scheme going and helping to work it he had fully counted on, and rather liked; but he did not calculate upon the stiff chopping breeze of religious and moral objection which he was now to encounter.

Only two months had passed away since we last saw him, and he was already banned by the religious microcosm of Waterdale. Even Dr. Alwyn, his much-enduring, tolerant, and patient friend, had preached against him, and condemned his philanthropic efforts as a godless illusion, a stumbling-block, and a snare. He had preached this out of the pulpit of his church; and wherever he went, into whatever villa, or cottage, or shop, he declared his condemnation of Lennon's scheme as irreligious and republican, setting class against class, and ignoring the teachings of the Church. For when once Dr. Alwyn came to think that anything really was irreligious he gave it no tolerance. He could shut his eyes to candles, and his ears to questionable chantings at wrong moments; he

was not very rigid as regards the exact size of Noah’s ark, and he was quite content to let geology have its say, he fearing not; but there were bounds to his principles of toleration, as there are to those of most people, and Lennon had quite unconsciously transgressed them.

Marry, how? What ignorant sin had he committed?

First of all he followed Carlyle’s advice, and took his stand on the alphabet. In other words, he invited to his village schools all boys and girls, men and women, who would come and receive a purely secular instruction. He taught arithmetic and spelling and history and geography; and left his pupils and fellow-students to get their religious teaching elsewhere—which they could easily do, for, backward as the place was, there was no lack whatever of machinery for the teaching of sectarian dogma, and the lists of the great kings and captains of the Scriptures, and who begat whom. Truly these bones of theology and Jewish history Dr. Alwyn and his wife had begun to clothe a little with the flesh, and quicken with the spirit, of warm Christian faith and charity and enlightenment; but even their approaches in that direction were over dusty, dry, and uninviting ground, the Waterdale instincts much preferring the hard and gritty old routine of teaching by rote and letter, which vexed not the brain and troubled not the heart. But against Lennon, who, as he said himself, could only “go in” for secular education, and thought he had better do that than do nothing, leaving the other work to other men—against him all united and combined. The ruling elders of the place rose as a man against unadulterated geography, and told all their dependents and confiding followers that arithmetic on its own merits stood condemned. Even Dr. Alwyn felt a little ashamed of his following, though not of his cause, when a good lady of Waterdale discovered heresy in a doctrine which she was given to understand Mr. Lennon taught or sanctioned—the belief, namely, that of the stars which were made solely for man’s mere use and enjoyment, tapers to light his nightly path, there were probably certain orbs so far away that man’s eyes or instruments could never get to see a ray of them. If this was not heresy, then, the worthy lady asked Dr. Alwyn, what was? And his attempt mildly and soothingly to convince her that her judgment was somewhat rash, only made her more wroth against the heresy and indignant with the heretic.

Then it must be owned that the coöperation of Tom Berry did not much tend to render Lennon's scheme popular with elders and vested interests. "Whatever a man of the sons of men shall say in his heart of the lords above," Tom Berry was very apt to say out aloud of the aristocratic, moneyed, and other classes who are lords above of our social system. Moreover, he had the ill-luck to infuse a savour of his old-world views into whatever subject he talked about, with whomsoever he talked. That every evil wherewith this country is occasionally afflicted is due to the pressure of an aristocratic and oligarchical system, kept up partly by peers, partly by millionaires, and partly by the timid or time-serving politicians who truckle to them, was Tom's principal article of faith. No Calvinist, no Hebrew, no Spanish Catholic, ever held to his creed with a more thorough and intolerant belief than Tom did to this. He made it his touchstone of all human worth. Blench from these principles, and you must be either a craven or a knave. Third way there was none. Even Lennon this last of the Chartists sometimes suspected in bitter and distrustful moments, when he saw him friendly with Walter Warton or confiding with the Alwyns; and the more these latter became gradually estranged from Ralph, the more Tom admired his leader and rejoiced.

The cottages did not fill. Some few families were there; but the occupants most ready to offer themselves were so plainly of the tramp class that their application had to be instantly rejected; and the resident population more and more fought shy of the business. As yet the vainest of dreamers could not flatter himself that he had accomplished any good. The self-governing system had not even got into operation, for there were not people enough in occupation to set it going. The schools ceased to have students. The tramp class came and occupied cottages here and there of nights, and could hardly be ejected until, desiring change of scene, they chose to depart of their own good pleasure. An incident occurred, too, which brought even graver scandal.

Readers will remember casual mention of a certain Bessie Raynes, to whom Mrs. Alwyn had been very kind, and about whom she once expressed herself to her husband as very uneasy. Bessie had been unwisely listening to the compliments of a young man of much better class than her own; and scandal

had come ; and Bessie had been much reprovèd, and promised to be wiser in future, and became not any wiser.

Bessie one day left the place, and disappeared—not too soon, people said ; “for you know one can’t help noticing, my dear,” one virtuous matron remarked to another ; “and really when I saw her the night before last, I could not but see,” &c., &c.

She disappeared, and the neighbourhood thought they had a good riddance of her for ever ; and the young man alluded to had gone abroad for some time ; and people thought the whole thing was happily got over. But after some months had elapsed, Tom Berry, going one morning into one of the empty cottages, was encountered by a feeble moan and two wistful hollow eyes ; and saw a thing all rags and rain huddled on the floor ; and learned that wretched Bessie Raynes had been only wandering a helpless vagrant through the country, and had come back, fate-driven, to the familiar place, and, not daring to knock at any door once friendly, had crept from the rain-storm that was pouring down into the desolate cottage, and prayed that she might not be turned from the fireless hearth.

Tom Berry assuredly was not the man to expel her. She was in his eyes now simply one other victim of a bloated and profligate aristocracy—the grandfather of her seducer, be it remarked, was a man who had made money in Liverpool by selling candles. Tom Berry told the story to Lennon, who insisted on his old housekeeper (whose niece indeed the girl was) going to look after her, and had the cottage furnished and warmed, and made comfortable for her, and had a doctor to attend upon her constantly, until her infant was born and she died. Whereupon Mrs. Beck, stimulated by Ralph, and herself now somewhat penitent, gave the child over to a married niece of her husband’s to be cared for and brought up ; and Lennon undertook to meet the expense of maintaining it ; and Tom Berry constantly went to look after it ; and O, what a scandal the whole story created, and what explanations were invented to save human nature the pain of believing in any disinterested benevolence ! Indeed if the half-empty cluster of cottages had been the Agapemone of a Mormon colony there could not have been more shaking of the head and shuddering than there was since the unlucky day when an outcast woman died and a nameless child was born there.

So the Lennon scheme was becoming day by day a more and

more disastrous failure. It might well have been called, as Dr. Alwyn predicted, Lennon's Folly. Lennon himself was highly unpopular all over the neighbourhood ; and at last it would have been difficult to name the excess of heresy and general wickedness which the good people of Waterdale would not have believed him quite ready to plunge into.

He held his ground however, very coolly, and by no means gave up the fight.

"Time and you and I, Tom, against any three," he said one day (paraphrasing the words of Walter Scott) to his trusty henchman.

Tom shook his head.

"They're a rotten lot here," was the henchman's forcible remark. "There's nothing in them, poor creatures ; no more back-bone than a wet playbill. I'm sick of them all ; and if I was you, Mr. Lennon, I'd cut the whole wretched concern, and go right away back to Australia."

But Lennon's thoughts and hopes were not now fixed quite exclusively on the success of his project of futile benevolence. He paid frequent visits to London, and was beginning to think himself growing younger.

"No, Tom," he replied cheerily, "I'm not going to give in just yet. These people are dreadfully averse to novelty of any kind ; wait a little until they get used to the thing, and you may be sure they will come round. We can afford to live down their bad opinion."

Tom felt inclined to express in strong terms his absolute contempt for their opinion, good or bad ; but he only shrugged his shoulders, and said nothing.

"Warton's going in for the borough over at last," said Tom, changing the subject.

The borough which Tom spoke of was the small town of Northnglen, a few miles off, on which Warton had long had designs, and which was, in fact, his last chance of a seat in Parliament. We have already noticed a peculiarity about this borough which rendered it fitting for the purpose. It was essentially a working-man's constituency—one of the few which chance, and 1832, and freemen's franchises, and other things had spared ; and no man might hope to sit for that borough who did not please the sturdy Northern working men ; and the votes of these decent artisans no man might buy for gallons of ale or sly bank-notes slipped into the hands of ready-witted

wives. Therefore there was a chance there for Warton, and a tempting prospect for the Tories, who had usually little hope of obtaining the control of such a seat. Could Warton talk over the working voters there into the belief that, while Toryism and bloated aristocracy were bad things in the abstract, and usually admitted to be enemies of freedom, yet at this particular juncture of affairs the Tories, and they alone, might safely be intrusted with the honour and the fortunes of England, now imperilled by the wiles of Bonapartean diplomacy and the plottings of continental despotism? That was the question.

That was the question which Tom Berry expounded now at considerable length, and after his own fashion, to Lennon, whose wandering attention, we fear, hardly took it all in.

“That’s it, you see, Mr. Lennon—there’s their game. It’s a plot, a downright plot, as much as if they swore to it over skulls and crossbones, as they used to at the old Coburg in the time when I was an apprentice, and used to take my place in the front row of the gallery. It’s a plant, a plot, a dirty Tory dodge; but I know how to spoil the game. I know a few chaps over in the town that are in a manner a sort of leaders among the workshops, fellows with the gift of the gab—and good-hearted fellows too, though one of ’em’s a Sunday open-air preaching man, and another’s a teetotal card—and I’ve opened their eyes a bit; and wait if you don’t see.”

“Then you don’t think Mr. Warton has any chance, Tom?”

“No; beg your pardon—I think he’d have a prime chance, if he’d got the pluck, the go in him! Bless you, these men are so sick of the Whigs, and the sham Liberals, and the whole humbugging lot of Parliament spouters, that I don’t know if they wouldn’t be glad to give a chance to a decent, manly, outspoken Tory who stood up to them *like* a man. No, Mr. Lennon; I think Wat Warton could make a chance if he had the spirit. But I know something about him; and I know that the roar of a good row about his ears will knock the feet from under him in no time; and you know that a crowd is like a horse, and soon finds out the man that can ride it and rein it, and delights to roll in the mud the chicken-hearted creature that can’t.”

“Well, Tom, I am glad neither you nor I count among the voters, for if we did I fear we should have to take opposite sides. I don’t myself care twopence for Whigs or Tories—

plague o' both their houses!—and I should like to serve Mr. Warton ; and so I think I should be weak and unpatriotic enough to give him my vote and helping hand. Confess, you last of the Romans, that you think me unworthy of the name of Briton ? ”

“ It takes a deal in these times to make anybody unworthy of the name of Briton,” Mr. Berry remarked sententiously. “ I wish we could make the name of Briton a little more worthy of honest men and free men. That's all ! ”

Lennon paid little attention to Berry's prophetic hints about the fate of Warton in the approaching struggle. His mind was wholly estranged from politics of late ; and even the fate of his philanthropic chimera concerned him far less than it might have done a few months ago. Questioning his own motives and emotions—playing sadly with his own feelings, as in loneliness he was sometimes wont to do—he made melancholy admission that a private and individual love rose up between him and his good wishes to his race or his neighbourhood. The smile of a woman hardly beyond the school-girl age was more to him just now than the regeneration of a city. He could have borne any other failure with composure ; he could have calmly lighted a fresh cigar and puffed it unemotional while listening to the news of the wreck of his schemes and the ruin of his whole fortune ; but he could not bring himself to ask Grace Ethelstone to marry him, dreading the terrible reply that she had always regarded him as a brother or a father, or in some other hideous and revolting aspect, and that she could not love him. He saw in her bright frank ways no sign of love, and he dreaded to invite a decision. “ Wait yet a little,” said his heart one day ; “ her affection will grow.” And another day it said, “ Coward and fool ! let the question be settled and done with for ever. Know the worst and bear it—as you can do if you will.” And yet again : “ For shame ! to think even of asking the girl, who knows nobody but you, who never disguises her warm sisterly affection, and who, if you press her, may easily mistake her feelings, or generously trample them under foot, and marry you out of pure good-nature, and find out her mistake too late—and yet all too soon. Be a man of spirit and honour. Do not try by that test a question to which common sense must tell you how to give an answer. If you love her, be just to her—and leave her to freedom.”

Between these impulses Lennon's resolution flickered for

some time—now drawn this way, now driven that. Great souls, of course, are never thus undecided. Heroes of fiction never ought to be. In whatever stress of difficulty, they ought to see their way clear before them, and march without a moment’s hesitation steadfastly along it. In a former work (which received such kindly and encouraging criticism as the author thinks of with gratefulness) there was a hero—at least a so-called hero—who on some rather important occasions of his life had some little difficulty and trouble about making up his mind. He received much critical condemnation for this lamentable weakness. Heroes of novels never ought to have any difficulty in making up their mind. They ought, at the worst, to achieve the whole of the operation as quickly as the Earl of Derby’s Cabinet accomplished it last February. The only excuse to be pleaded is that in real life most of us do actually find ourselves, at certain emergencies, much embarrassed as to what course we ought to take—do resolve upon one thing to-night, and next morning think another thing would be better; and by noon reject both plans; and perhaps find the question arbitrarily decided for us by chance in the end—chance being to many of us the flight of birds rising from the left or the right, the indications of the sacred entrails, the omens of the stars, the answer resounding from the tripod, and all the other external impulses to lagging decision which even the heroes of the old world did not disdain to invite.

At all events, by every example of ancient and mediæval and modern hero, we may claim some pardon and indulgence for one who is only a hero in the conventional and circulating-library sense, if he hesitated a little about inviting a final and perhaps a fatal decision from the woman he loved. Even Roland or Lancelot of the Lake might have felt less firmly decided about challenging the sentence of his mistress than about storming a castle or slaying a Saracen.

Besides, Ralph had of late observed, or fancied he observed, a certain reserve and coldness in Grace Ethelstone’s manner towards himself. As he waxed into warmth and demonstrativeness, she waned, he thought, into chilliness and restraint. Perhaps she understood his attentions, and wished to signify thus quietly that she could not accept them. He was distressed by her manner, which, of course, if it had had the slightest gleam of coquettishness about it, might have been encouraging; and if it had seemed to be the reserve and timid embarrassment

arising from a girl's natural wish to hide her feelings, would have been a source of rapture to him ; but it seemed to be neither. It appeared quite spontaneous, unfeigned, and real. The more and more he became the accepted guide and helper of Mabel and the family, the more Grace appeared to draw back from him.

Of course, every one will have guessed that he sent off at once to Mabel the money which she so much needed at the time when he had his memorable conversation on the bridge with Grace. Mabel took the money delightedly ; it relieved her from immense embarrassment ; and she wrote Ralph a letter of incoherent and effusive thanks. She told Grace with joy and pride of the assistance she had received, and was utterly unable to understand the deep depression and vexation with which her niece received the gladsome news. Poor Mabel, when in a fix, never cared how she got out of it, provided there was nothing sinful in the means of escape ; and she could not understand in the least how anybody could object to her taking a little help from the liberal hand of an old and dear friend.

"Ralph would do anything for me, child," she said with a sort of mild complacent triumph. "He would indeed, dear old Ralph ; though, of course, he doesn't care for me now at all, except just as a friend. I don't quite think he fully appreciates Walter even yet ; men, I suppose, don't forget these things for a long time. Anger outlives love, Grace, I fear. But he would do anything for me ; and I know he would be little pleased to think of me and the children being in any difficulty, and not asking him to help us out of it. Besides, you must remember that he is a bachelor as yet, and he really has nothing to do with his money. I am sure if he wanted money and we had it—"

"Which is not likely," interjected Grace.

"No, indeed, dear ; not likely at all, I fear, for the present—at least, until Walter gets a place of some kind. But I was going to say that if Ralph Lennon wanted money, and we had it, he should have it with delight from me—and from Walter too, Grace."

"What will Walter say to this begging of money from Mr. Lennon ?"

"It's not begging, Grace ; I wonder you can talk so. Do you think we are robbers ?"

"Robbers don't generally beg, I believe, except in *Gil Blas* perhaps."

"Well, beggars then. Do you think we are beggars?"

"Yes, Mabel, I do. I think it is nothing short of begging to take this money from Mr. Lennon. I hate to think of the whole thing. Rather than stoop to such a transaction, I would have pawned my watch or sold my last dress."

"O, for shame, Grace, to talk in such a way; and such childish nonsense too, as if all the dresses I have in the world would bring a quarter of two hundred pounds, even if they were new; and you see what my purple silk is looking like already, after three months! Besides, you don't understand Ralph Lennon—"

"Do I not? Ah, yes I do!" Grace sighed unconsciously, but so distinctly, that Mabel looked at her with kindly, feeling, motherly eyes.

"Well, dear, what I mean is, that you cannot think he cares about a few pounds lent to a friend. Only lent, you know, of course. Why, child, you don't suppose Walter won't repay every farthing of it?"

"Then Walter knows of it?"

"O yes, of course. I would not have any secret from Walter for all the world. We never had any secrets from each other—never."

"And Walter approves?"

"Quite approves. More than that, my dear,—and I only tell it to show how nonsensical your scruples were; for you know that Walter is one of the most sensitive of men,—it was he who suggested getting a loan of a few pounds from Ralph. He said when he was going away that if any pressing demand should be made on us during his absence, it might be as well to write a line to Ralph. So odd that he should have said it too, when I am sure he did not know that any difficulty was likely to occur; for he would have told me if he had expected this vexatious call upon us just then."

"He arranged it all beforehand, then? And he asked you to write?"

"No; not exactly that. He said something about your being on the spot, and mentioning the matter to Ralph; but I suppose it was better that you did not do anything in the matter. Unmarried girls cannot be expected to make such requests; and indeed, Grace, I hope you will never have to make them of any one."

Grace had been glowing with shame and anger during this

conversation. She, then, was to have been used as an instrument to extract money to pay Walter Warton's debts—and to extract it from Ralph Lennon! Her cheeks burned with vexation and resentment. But she said not a word. To open up the question to Mabel would be the most futile waste of breath and temper.

"Do you know, Grace," said Mabel, after a moment's pause, "I sometimes think Ralph Lennon is very fond of you?"

"Do you?"

This was said coldly, and without the slightest emphasis of tone, or appearance of interest in the question.

"Indeed I do. I grow more and more convinced of it every day. My dear, I don't want to influence you, of course; but any woman Ralph Lennon marries ought to be happy; and you would suit him, for you have brains and are clever, and could fall in with his ways and appreciate him, which other women could not do. O, I should be so glad if I could think——"

"Please, Mabel, don't—O please don't talk in that way! I shall never be able to look Mr. Lennon in the face if you go on in such a manner! Don't, dear Mabel, don't let him think he has fallen among thieves, like the man who went down into Jericho."

"Grace!"

"Yes; that we are all determined to plunder him, and drag him into toils, and lay schemes and snares and base matrimonial plots for him, because he has money. I would never meet him again—never, never!—if I thought he suspected anything of the kind. He has never bestowed a thought on me—why should he?—except as a friend, as a poor girl whom he would serve and help in life if he could—as he would help any one, indeed, who wanted help. He has never thought of me in any other way; and of course I have—I have never thought of him. Don't let us speak of it any more; it tortures me to think of his hearing a whisper of such a thing—a whisper perhaps from one of the children—and despising us. He may pity us now; I fear he cannot help that, and it is bad enough; but he cannot yet despise us. Do not force him to that too."

"My dear Grace, I don't quite understand you; but of course I respect and like your sensitiveness. And you surely don't imagine I would ever say a word to place a girl, even if

she were not my own niece, in an awkward and embarrassing position towards a man, even so honourable a man as Ralph Lennon? No, no, you foolish child. But I was merely talking of what I had observed—talking of it between ourselves."

"But we ought not to talk of it between ourselves, or to talk of it or think of it at all. It seems so mean and ignoble and unwomanly. I know, Mabel, that you do not mean it so, and would not say it if you could only see things with my eyes just for a moment. But pray don't speak of it any more. You are quite mistaken, believe me—utterly mistaken. And I only wish you had never thought of it at all."

Mabel gave in and said no more; but thought she was right for all that.

Grace was seriously and bitterly grieved.

"Why are some women, even good women, so mean?" she asked herself. "Why can they never hear a friendly word exchanged, see a cordial clasp of the hand given, between a girl and a man, but they suggest and suspect plottings and secret designs about marriage? This kind-hearted and simple aunt of mine does not, in her inmost soul, believe one word I say. She thinks my heart is set on marrying Mr. Lennon, and—good Heaven!—she would think nothing, in her simple, credulous candour, of assuming that he was actually in love with me, and taking him into her full confidence, and disgracing us all. Rather than bear that humiliation, rather than endure that he should despise me, or should confound me in his mind with the miserable schemes of our beggarly and ignoble life, I would go to the other end of the earth. I have stayed too long here. I have given up much for poor Mabel; but I cannot give up my pride of independence, and I will not be shamed in his eyes. Whatever happens, he shall not think me mean and selfish and craven of spirit. I don't ask for his love" (and tears burst into her eyes), "but I will have at least his respect."

This conversation, interjected awkwardly enough into a chapter of which the scene is laid in Cumberland, will serve to explain why Grace Ethelstone seemed to Lennon to receive him now with less of confiding cordiality than she used to show. He began to think sadly that this change of demeanour could have no purpose but one, that of conveying to him in as delicate a manner as possible her personal disinclination for

love-making so far as he was concerned. Lennon, of course, had eyes—very keen eyes too—for the demeanour of those around him. Love never blinds us to the significance of our reception at the hands of the loved one's brother or mother or father, or even aunt. The dullest among us has never failed to gather from the looks and ways of *her* people whether the said people thought us a desirable person to become a member of the family. As regards Lennon, there was hardly any attempt at concealment. Mabel's manner conveyed, as clearly as anything short of words could express a feeling, her earnest anxious wish for Ralph and Grace to fall desperately in love with each other. Very little encouragement would have brought words in plenty from her lips to make still clearer the impression which her manner conveyed. Walter Warton seldom failed when he met Ralph to sound in a delicate and indirect way the praises of his niece. All this, however, was now only embarrassing to Lennon. He dreaded being regarded as the benefactor of the family, whom Grace was bound to marry out of gratitude whenever he asked her; and he mentally vowed that if once he came to know her true feelings, no word of his should ever tempt her to a sacrifice. "I have never held," he said to himself, "that a man has a right to persecute a girl because it is her misfortune and his that he can't help loving her. Let him stifle his love—or himself, if he can do nothing better; but let *her* be free to choose. And I hope I am not yet mean enough to take advantage of any influence I may have with a girl's family—any old regard they may have for me—to persuade her into marrying me. No: she would have little to congratulate herself on if she married me of her own free and loving will; she shall never be coerced or persuaded or talked into doing anything else. If she could care for me—if she could!—then I think I could make her happy; and I should seem to have lived for something, and this dull and dreary life would be exquisite and bright. But, good heavens, who is happy? Who has what he wants? And why do I expect to be any better off than my neighbours?"

Still he had some little hope. That is obvious enough, even from the final question into which his thoughts shaped themselves. When one asks himself what right he has to expect this or that, it is pretty certain that, whether he has the right or no, he does somehow cherish the expectation. Despair does not pause to interrogate itself in that sort of way. Ralph

Lennon had some hope. He would not yet believe that Grace cared nothing for him ; but he shrank from testing his hope, and perhaps proving it false. He recoiled from the blank prospect which life must once more present if he should find the light of that one hope suddenly extinguished. And he found, of course, discreet, prudential, and practical reasons to justify his delay yet a little longer. “If she really does not care for me it will be better, far better, for her sake that I should not subject her to the pain of having to refuse, and perhaps to bear the well-meant agonizing remonstrances of Warton and Mabel. No—if I can save her from that it will be something. I am not quite a fool—I certainly am not quite a boy ; and though I don’t pretend to much knowledge of the ways of women, yet I ought to be able to find out, without asking, whether a girl loves me or not.” And then he thought again and again over every word she said ; he revelled in a Barmecide feast of glances that seemed loving, and pressures of the hand that might have meant sympathy ; he found flattering reasons for coldness, and coined hope out of even silence and absence. And then, another mood setting in, he blew all the golden mist and airy chimeras of lover’s dreams roughly away, and spurned at himself as a fool, and took the worst as the reality, and tried to look it full in the face. Amid the little trumpery vexations which were surrounding him at home,—the failure of his chimerical plan, the marked and general unpopularity and coarse disfavour with which the people of Waterdale received him, the almost universal reproach which had come upon him just because he tried to do a little good, the falling-away of friends, the gibes and rejoicings of enemies,—it was something strengthening and elevating to have this sanctuary of his heart, to which he could retire and commune with even the hope of a love, and set up his Madonna-shrine, and worship it, even though with unheard and futile adoration. He had passed the age when men storm and swear, Swinburne-like, against the most high gods, and defy earth and skies and the inexorable Immortals, and rejoice to pelt their poor little detonating thunder-pellets against the cloud-shapes that veil the heavens. He could no longer enjoy the sweet consoling egotism which sees an implacable war of man against destiny in every chance breath that blows away some tiny thistledown of human hope. So his melancholy, his occasional heart-sickness of deferred hope, his not uncommon intervals of

blank despair, were unrelieved by any of the cheering and comforting vanity which makes a disappointed youth regard himself as a Prometheus specially punished by the gods; an Ixion, chained to an eternal wheel because he had dared to love. Indeed, his mental condition had something of the peculiar discomfort about it which the noble old hero and humourist, Abraham Lincoln, so pithily described after the news of some profound disaster. "I find it hard to bear," said the great President, "because I am too much hurt to laugh, and I am too big to cry." Lennon was sometimes too much hurt to laugh, and he was past the age for crying—even for crying out against Fate, and heroically arraigning the order of things.

And poor Grace meanwhile had a weary time enough of it. It used to be one of her great delights, her self-appointed reward for dreary duties cheerfully and satisfactorily got through, to shut herself up in her own room sometimes, away from Mabel and the children and the maids and everything, and indulge herself in an hour of delight with her pencils, her drawing-paper, and her fresh young imagination. But now her work and her play had alike less absorbing power. She did not enjoy her hour of seclusion with her drawing, and her imagination ran quite away from *Antigone* and the classic marbles, and her self-culture made no progress at all. The short time she allowed herself for such purposes wasted itself away in fruitless thought and longing and pining. She would sit over her paper for an hour without having once drawn a pencil-line upon it, and then sigh and put the task away from her—once it used not to be a task, but a joy and a refreshment—and try to lose herself in the common life of the house. Once she was sitting and thinking sadly enough, and more than vaguely enough, when a noisy clattering came at the door, and she found herself beleaguered by boisterous little Watty. She surrendered unconditionally, and admitted the young invader. He had come to remind her of a promise to draw him a knight on horseback, and he insisted upon her redeeming her pledge before she put away her pencils; so she drew him a splendid cavalier, magnificent in mail and sweeping plume, and bestriding a rampant steed whose mane and tail might have been the envy of the Fair One with Golden Locks; and Watty was delighted.

"O, dear," thought Grace, half-smiling, half-inclined to cry,

“how I wish *he* were a knight, and were going to the wars ; and that I might dress myself like a page and go with him—and be killed !”

CHAPTER XVIII.

WARTON AND HIS NEIGHBOUR'S WIFE.

THE clouds were thickening and blackening around Walter Raleigh Warton. A storm must come, and either destroy his fields altogether, or carry off the bad weather and give him purer air and the chance of a better harvest. In plain language, he was near a financial crisis. He was literally steeped in debt ; and he could only buy even a temporary postponement of a crash by opening up new sources of indebtedness. He had started in life as a Swell Democrat, if we may use that term ; and he felt convinced it was the best sort of enterprise, if only he could just get time to round a certain difficult point and make his way into the smooth water of a parliamentary career. He had a certain pride in being a Swell Democrat ; indeed, he considered that he had created the part. For the *rôle* he had introduced was by no means to be confounded with the familiar part of the Patrician Democrat—the part played by the scion of some noble house who, from sincere conviction, or personal vanity, or love of novelty and adventure, becomes a leader of the people. This part Warton, of course, knew to be quite out of his line. Even the name of Raleigh and the vaguely-implied descent would not make of him a Charles James Fox, a Mirabeau, an Edward Fitzgerald, a Smith O'Brien, or even a Tom Duncombe. But he thought he could conceive and impersonate a new kind of demagogue—a refined and glorified working man ; a being who, while he boasted of being only one generation removed from the working man (with perhaps some hint of a grand ancestral source far back in historical days, the stream whereof unfortunately became almost lost in the sand and mud of later years), should yet have the manners, the appearance, the delicate features, the white hands of your azure-blooded aristocrat ; who should have the tastes, the luxurious habits, even the extravagance of the patrician ; who should smoke cigars with elder sons, walk down to the House arm-in-

arm with county members, and talk dinner-table nonsense to countesses. Now he had played this part very bravely, very cleverly, and with a certain fluctuating and tantalising degree of success ; but as yet without anything like the success he had anticipated. He was now rather poorer than ever ; his flirtations with countesses had been but rare and passionately remembered delights ; and his political patrons were beginning to distrust him ; that is, his new political patrons—those under whose auspices he started in life had dropped him down long ago. If he could get into the House and make any kind of way there, and render such service to his new party as would secure him a permanent office, or even drag him into the ranks of those who are always marked for parliamentary office when their party is in—if he could do this, all might go well. He could manage to pay his debts somehow—an M.P. can get over many difficulties insurmountable to a poor outsider ; and then place of some kind would surely fall to his lot. Once in the House, what might not ambition and talents accomplish ? Look at Canning ! Look at Disraeli ! Nay, look at Bright, who doubtless, if he cared for office, and went the right way to get it, would have been a Cabinet Minister years ago. Why might not he, Walter Raleigh Warton, accomplish something ? In fact, behind the swinging doors of the House of Commons gleamed for him his El Dorado.

The one sad obstacle in his way was, he thought, his poverty. He writhed under poverty. He raged against it. He cursed it for every failure. He laid all blame on it—on it and on destiny. In no other country, he thought, would narrow means have so obstructed a man as in England. Let him borrow as he would, and spend as he would, he could not even seem to be anything but poor. Captain Eastham and others of his friends, when discussing his parliamentary prospects, seemed to take his poverty as an admitted thing, a matter of course, a fact necessarily to be considered in making the calculations. No class of persons in the world are more frank in admitting and discussing the impecuniosity of themselves and their friends than young men of family in England ; no class care less about money in estimating the relative value of their acquaintances and associates. Warton might have known this, for he had mixed a good deal, of late, with the young patrician class ; and yet every allusion which betrayed a knowledge of his poverty stung and startled him. He was secretly very bitter against destiny and

the social laws which prevented a hard-up, unprincipled adventurer of showy talents from becoming at once a man of fortune and a Cabinet Minister. He was rather hard upon Destiny, too, for having allowed him to marry a poor girl without any brains, or for not having devised some convenient code of British marriage law which would enable him to get rid of her now and look out for a woman with money.

Now he set, as we have already said, his fate at present upon the chances of the coming or expected election in the peculiar borough described by his old associate and present enemy Tom Berry. This succeeding, all might yet go well ; this failing, then the deluge might as well come, so far as he was concerned, for he felt that he could struggle no more, and must succumb ; unless—he had just one other chance in reserve—unless Ralph Lennon should come to the rescue. And he saw some prospect of this being easily and somewhat decently arrived at, if Lennon would but fall in love with Grace, and marry her ; for Lennon, he said to himself, was just the man to let his wife do anything with his money if he loved her, and Grace was as good-natured and generous as a child. Warton's imagination and envy had already bestowed on Lennon the riches of a pro-consul or a Liverpool merchant-prince.

So he went to work at his exciting little game of chess ; and as he loved excitement for its own sake, he felt a sort of pleasure which counteracted to a certain degree the discomfort of his troubled prospects. But it takes a very exceptional man indeed to play chess with human beings for knights and castles and pawns. In making his finest scheme Warton forgot to allow for the breath of his own passion, which always blew down his pieces, and spoiled his game ; and so, just at the time when it behoved him to keep on the best terms with everybody who could in the slightest degree influence his fortunes, an evil fate threw him in the way of Myra Alwyn, and well-nigh spoiled all.

He succeeded in arousing in her mind something like interest and sympathy. She thought him the victim of a boyish passion and an ill-assorted marriage. The manner in which he conveyed this impression to her mind was so skilful that she believed the revelation to be the involuntary disclosure of a mind far too proud, sensitive, and manly to betray willingly the secret of its pain. Then he talked in a strain of apparently profound religious conviction ; and there are few women indeed

whom the phrases and symbols of piety cannot deceive. In short, she pitied him, and wished him well ; and he had self-conceit enough to believe that he discerned in her manner the indications of a deeper feeling.

Captain Eastham, whose house he made for the present his principal head-quarters, was much taken with the Alwyns, husband and wife, and was very glad to drive over to their house in company with Warton, and have luncheon or dinner there. And of course the honourable and gallant member was not very long in discerning that there was something rather too devoted and tender in the manner of his friend towards the wife of his other friend. Eastham was a thoroughly manly young fellow, and he did not at all like that sort of thing.

"I tell you what, Warton," he said, as they drove home one night, "you are carrying this a little too far. It won't do, man ; give it up in time."

"Give what up, my dear fellow ?"

"Now, don't play the innocent. You know what I mean ; for you saw me sending warning looks to-night. Glad nobody else noticed anything—"

"But do favour me with some glimpse of your meaning."

"I mean your manner towards Alwyn's wife. It is becoming quite marked ; and it will be sure to attract some notice from more unfriendly and suspicious eyes than mine, and make a row of some kind."

"My good fellow, how can you talk so ? What evil constructions you fast men—men of the world—put upon everything ! I like Mrs. Alwyn much. I hope I may call myself her friend."

"I hope you may—and her husband's friend, too ; for he is one of the finest fellows I know : and do you know, Warton, I don't think he's a man to stand much nonsense, reverend though he be."

"But Eastham, you really have no ground—"

"Very likely. I am quite sure there is no ground for fearing any harm. If I know anything of women I take our reverend friend's wife to be a regular trump ; a fine, good-hearted woman, without a bit of evil in her, or a grain of rubbishy sentiment and mad French nonsense. I take it that she is as safe as the Bank of England. I don't mean to say there is the slightest danger of anything but ill-natured and silly people getting up a talk, which you know very well they would do

fast enough ; and I tell you, Warton, frankly, that I think you have no right to give the slightest reason for such a talk. These are good and simple people. They have brains enough in literary ways and that—I wish I had as much—but he is not a man of the world, and she is not a woman of the world. They have not been much in the sort of atmosphere of smoke and gas and midnight, and that kind of thing, that some of us are rather too well accustomed to. They seem to take it for granted that every man means well, and is a gentleman in their sense—which, I suppose, is the true sense ; and pray let not either of us undeceive them.”

“An interesting lecture, Captain Eastham, and very edifying. Your moral philosophy, however, is quite thrown away on me. I hope I know how to conduct myself like a gentleman.”

“I hope so too,” said Eastham, calmly and gravely.

“Do you mean this to be an insult, Eastham ?” asked Warton, in a low hoarse tone, all the blood he had rushing to his pale cheeks. He writhed, Democrat and Working Man though he boasted himself, at the slightest word which seemed to cast a doubt on his full title to the rank of gentleman.

Eastham saw his anger, and was sorry to have offended him, especially by harping on such a string. Perhaps if Warton had come of a noble house, the warm-hearted young Tory might have given an angry answer ; but as it was he feared that he had hurt the feelings of his companion in an unmanly and illegitimate way ; and he hastened to make atonement.

“Indeed I don’t, old fellow ; and I should be sorry to say a word to annoy you. I know as well as anybody can that you are incapable of anything that is not honourable and manly, and I hope I have not conveyed any other idea. But you know how much better lookers-on can judge of the effect of most things than the performers ; and I thought it would be as well to give you a hint that you seemed rather more attentive to Mrs. Alwyn than perhaps might seem satisfactory to suspicious eyes. One can’t be too careful, you know—and both you and I think too well of these people to do anything which could possibly annoy or offend them. That’s all. I didn’t mean to deliver you a lecture on morals, which you don’t want, and I am not, perhaps, exactly qualified to give.”

“Thanks. I am really much obliged to you, Eastham ; and

perhaps you are quite right. I need not tell you, I hope, that I had not the least idea I was giving cause for any suspicion whatever. I have the warmest friendship for Myra Alwyn ; she seems a woman capable of understanding a man,—in that fact alone a rare phenomenon, Eastham ; and I did not suppose it possible that anybody could put a false construction upon a frank and avowed friendship, even though between a man and a woman. I am glad to think that *she* never did—she is far too true and pure for that. But your hint is doubtless a wise one in a worldly point of view—just the point of view I am too apt to ignore ; and you may be sure I will pay attention to it.”

The present impression upon Captain Eastham’s mind was that all this was rather too meek and innocent and eloquent. But he was ashamed to entertain even a momentary suspicion of his friend’s sincerity ; and he set the protestations of innocence down to the score of Warton’s habits as a teacher of the masses.

So the subject dropped ; but Warton did not forget what had been said, and part of it only confirmed a suspicion which had always been rankling at his heart, that his Tory friends and patrons never forgot his origin—never regarded him quite as one of themselves ; that to them he was the educated working-man’s son, to be patronized and treated kindly because of his talents and his services : but nothing more.

Regarding the immediate subject of the conversation, he resolved of course to be cautious. He could not afford just now to do anything which might displease Eastham, on whose friendship and energy he especially relied ; but Captain Eastham had far better have said nothing about the matter. For Warton, who could never believe in the possibility of any one talking “right out” on any subject, speaking from his heart all he had to say without reserve or *arrière pensée*, at once concluded that Eastham had observed much more than he acknowledged. In fact, he assumed that Eastham, keen-eyed, well trained in the world’s ways, not unskilled in reading the thoughts and hearts of women, had seen in Mrs. Alwyn’s manner something that made him fear for her if brought too much within the sphere of Warton’s influence. A hideous flush of rapture filled Warton’s heart. He was not a Tartuffe—was there ever a Tartuffe, any more than a Don Quixote, in the real flesh?—and he did not know himself, or even suspect

himself, to be a hypocrite ; nor had he any set deliberate purpose of evil in his heart just now. But he was pleased to think of himself as one who had at last found the only being capable of appreciating him, and whose fate he held in his hands. He loved to play with fire, to gaze across the limits of the unlawful. His passion of vanity was flattered and intoxicated as much as his passion of love was roused ; and he was dangerous now even to himself. The animal courage which he ordinarily wanted was supplied now, for the time at least, by other emotions ; and in his new excitement he would have rushed on danger, just as a timid man becomes reckless when fired by wine.

So, having resolved to be cautious, he nevertheless made every effort to throw himself in Mrs. Alwyn's way ; and failing for a day or two, he boldly went to see her. An evil fortune favoured him—she was alone.

She was writing letters, and she did not particularly want to see him or any one. Perhaps she least wished just then to see *him*. A vague instinct might possibly have already warned her ; but she could assign to herself no clear reason for not seeing him. She thought it would be hard and unfriendly not to see him. So he was admitted, and she gave him a cordial welcome.

One of Myra's weaknesses, as we have already said, was a love of brilliant dressing. She was quite conscious of her attractiveness ; she knew there was beauty in her dark gleaming eyes, her thick dark hair, her white skin, her delicate hands, her small but full figure. She liked to adorn herself and admire herself ; she never wished to be for a moment in dishabille ; it is doubtful even if Dr. Alwyn ever saw her in anything more negligent than an artistic negligence. This particular day she wore a morning dress of studied carelessness ; of some rich material or other, amber in hue and delightfully flowing in folds, and fastened in front with a jewelled brooch that sent out a myriad sparkles at every motion of the wearer. There was a sense of that profusion about her which, according to Mary Wortley Montagu, enhances so much the charms of beauty. She really did look very graceful and fascinating ; and Warton's eyes lighted up as he looked upon her. There was something strange about his expression as her eyes met his ; something which she afterwards remembered sent an uncomfortable sensation through her ; but it was dispelled in a moment, and for the time forgotten.

"I have disturbed you," said Warton ; "but I hope you will forgive me."

"No—not disturbed me ; at least, I can finish what I was doing at any time. I expect Dr. Alwyn home in a few minutes."

"Indeed !" The word was spoken with studied carelessness, to convey the impression that Warton had almost forgotten Dr. Alwyn's existence. "I have not seen you for days, Mrs. Alwyn ; and I am returning to town very soon—perhaps to-morrow ; and I could not leave without seeing *you*."

"But you are coming again? We shall often see you down in this region? Especially if the people of Northingen choose you for their representative, you will have to come this way often, to look after your constituents. They are very jealous people in this part of the world, Mr. Warton, and exact an immense amount of attention from their member of parliament, or their clergyman, or indeed anybody on whom they have the slightest claim."

"I am sorry for it. I do not wish to come here too often."

"Indeed? Then I advise you not to try to become member for Northingen. O, you don't know what exacting creatures we are down here! Ask Dr. Alwyn—he knows."

"I sometimes wish I had not come here, Mrs. Alwyn. I sometimes think it was my evil star that lighted me this way."

"You don't fear to fail, surely? My husband says your chances are very good, and so does Captain Eastham. I really don't know much about electioneering affairs myself. I don't believe I ever took much interest in any election before ; but I am quite anxious about this, and I ask all sorts of people ; and they tell me you have a great chance."

"Then you do really take so much interest in it?"

"Indeed I do, and so does Alwyn. I want you—*we* want you to succeed, and to find a proper field for your talents and an opening for your ambition. You are thrown away when not in parliament. Everybody says so."

"Your words are delightful to me. I care very little whether I win or lose if you take so much interest in my fortune. Mrs. Alwyn, I have always longed for human sympathy—for a woman's sympathy, such as you can give. How happy are they—they who, like your husband, can find it

always! Some of us are less fortunate. Believe me, I feel your kind words deeply."

Mrs. Alwyn looked at him rather surprised. She became again uncomfortable, and would have been very glad indeed to hear her husband's step.

Warton had risen from his seat, and was leaning against the chimneypiece, gazing at her. She tried to put the personal question away.

"Do you know that I was just about beginning a letter to your niece, Mr. Warton, when you came in? I fear she finds me a bad correspondent. But it really is not my fault, and I am very fond of her."

"She is happy," replied Warton. "She loves *you*. But, indeed, who does not that has ever known you?"

This was rather too much. Mrs. Alwyn's colour heightened. The truth began to force itself upon her. She would fain have fought against it; but it came on irresistibly.

"On the contrary," she said coldly, "I am not at all much of a favourite, nor disposed to strong and sudden likings. May I ask you to touch the bell, Mr. Warton? I expect my husband, and I must give some directions."

"A moment—one moment, Mrs. Alwyn. I shall not see you soon again. I must not see you. O, forgive me, but I cannot recall what I have said, and I read in your eyes that you have understood it. I do not regret it; no, I am glad that you know it. Who could be near you, as I have been, and not feel to you as I feel?"

He endeavoured to take her hand, for she had risen from her seat the moment he began his speech, and was moving forward as if to touch the bell herself. She calmly drew her hand back—she was very angry, but perfectly self-possessed.

"Mr. Warton, I suppose it is in some way my fault that you have ventured to speak to me in this way. But I was quite unconscious—I am unconscious now—of having ever given you the slightest excuse for such an insult."

"It is indeed in no way your fault, except the fault that Heaven has visited you with, and which has made me so mad as to offend you. But you have too good a heart not to feel for me and forgive me."

"Allow me to pass, please; I have no right to hear any more of this."

"Stay, Mrs. Alwyn, one moment! I pray you hear me,

and I will say nothing that even you may not hear. I came here to-day only to take leave of you—for ever. I did not mean to have spoken one word to betray my—my secret. But we must not part until you have forgiven me—until you say I am forgiven. What is my offence, except the indiscretion of speaking out what you must have known?”

“These words, Mr. Warton, are but another insult. I never knew, I never dreamed of such a thing. If I had done so, you should have had no chance of abusing my confidence in your truthfulness and your honour. There, we have had quite enough of this.”

“But you will hear me—at least a word!”

“Then pray speak it quickly, and with as little of sentiment as may be. I am not romantic, Mr. Warton; and I fail to appreciate scenes of this kind.”

“But you are a woman, Myra—pardon me, Mrs. Alwyn—and you know what creatures, what hapless creatures, we men are, and how we are the fools of sympathetic tones and kind looks. Think of what my life usually is—a blank, bare desert so far as love and sympathy and affinity of intellect and heart are concerned; and think of what I saw, what I must have seen, in you; and then blame me as you will for my wild indiscretion; but forgive me for that which was my only fault. I ask pardon in the humblest way. Do not refuse it to me. Remember, as a Christian woman, how weak and easily betrayed we are all, all—the best of us.”

There seemed to be sincerity and contrition in his tone, and the appeal to Myra as a Christian woman conscious of un-Christian weaknesses overcame her. She began to think that his worst fault was indeed, perhaps, that indiscreet confession of a feeling he could not banish. “Are we responsible for our secret emotions?” thought Myra; and a flush of conscience-driven crimson came over her cheeks. “Can we shut our hearts against every unbidden feeling? Shall we not be judged for what we say and do and sanction, not for the resisted, repelled, yet unconquerable feelings which invade our human hearts? Alas,” she asked herself in that moment of sudden conflict, “is he any worse than I, except that he has allowed himself to be betrayed into speech? Shall I condemn him and expose his error? I, of all women in the world!”

So she spoke to him in gentle, not unkindly tone: “Mr. Warton, I am very, very sorry for all this. I am doubly

sorry, because I fear it must have been in some way my fault. But I earnestly entreat you to believe that I never knew—never suspected anything of the kind. It is due to myself to say this, and to ask you to believe it. I am sure that you are now deeply sorry for what has happened ; and I do believe, however wrongly you may have spoken, that you are too much a man of honour and a Christian ever to allude to this humiliating subject again. Let it be forgotten between us.”

He waved his hand impatiently, but then let his eyes fall, and stood in an attitude of profound penitence. Womanlike, she felt a throb of pity for him, thus struggling with himself and thus humbled.

“Let it all be forgotten ; and for my part, I forgive it. I cannot think I am doing wrong when I say that the unfortunate words you have spoken—and which I am sure you did not mean—shall be as if they were never said. Good-bye.”

“Then we are still friends ?” he said in a hesitating tone.

“Still friends, I hope, Mr. Warton—at least not enemies.”

She bowed, and did not put out her hand. But he seized it ; and, before she could anticipate or prevent the action, he brought it to his lips. Not with passion or fervour, however—only respectfully and sadly. She could hardly resent the touch of his lips to her hand, so slight, so reverential was it. Indeed, there was no time ; for in that instant Warton left the room, and she stood alone by the hearth.

As Warton left the house, he saw Dr. Alwyn come riding up. He drew back, turned another way, and so avoided the meeting. Not that he had any sensitive or scrupulous objection to reciprocating a friendly grasp of Dr. Alwyn’s hand. But he knew that to meet him would almost infallibly necessitate a return to the house, and perhaps a dinner there ; and he would not on any consideration have spoiled in Myra’s eyes the picturesque and dramatic effect of his sudden departure. Prose after that poetry would be, he thought, a most ruinous anticlimax.

For he left Myra’s presence not repentant and despairing, but full of hope and confidence. He had deliberately applied a touchstone, and he considered the result satisfactory. The one thing in life which Warton could not believe in was the simple virtue of an intellectual woman. Of his wife’s innocence he felt satisfied, because he knew her to be so quiet and stupid. But with intelligence and quick emotions always

went, he thought, some symphony of irregular and unconquerable passion. And when Myra promised not to betray him, not to expose him, he read condonation, and even a faint and distant pledge of encouragement, in the promise. So, as he went, his way was lighted by a lustrous, lurid glow of passion ; and he was ready to follow it whithersoever it might lead.

And Myra? She felt deeply grieved and humbled. She was sorry for him, whom she could no longer respect ; she was sorry for herself, and ashamed ; she almost shrank from her husband's clear, confident eyes, as if there were some shameful secret hidden from him, and to which she was a party.

But Dr. Alwyn came in that moment.

"Anything the matter, my little woman?" he asked. "You seem put out."

"Yes, I think I am a little put out, Alwyn dear. But it's nothing ; and don't mind me, please."

"Well, I know that asking questions does not tend to put a woman in again if she happens to be put out. But come—just one question, and then I'll let you alone until you like to make me your confidant. Is it anything serious?"

"O, no, dear ; nothing."

"Yet one other question——"

"Where is your promise? Broken already?" said Myra, trying to look pleasant.

"Well, just this one. Has anybody been here telling you any bad news?"

"No, dear ; I have heard no news, good or bad. Somebody has been here, however—Mr. Warton."

She could not look up as she got out the words, slowly, and with a desperate effort to pronounce them carelessly.

"I knew that was Warton I saw leaving the house just as I came up. I tried to signal him ; but he didn't see me, and turned away. Why didn't he stay?"

"He seemed in haste ; in fact he is going up to town very soon ; and he only came to make a call."

"*He* has not been telling you any disagreeable news, Myra dear?"

"More questions, Alwyn? Again your pledge broken? Come, I must not be a party to such breaking of promises, and so I'll not answer you another word."

The assumed gaiety of her manner did not at all deceive her husband. He was generally that best and shrewdest of observers, an unsuspecting observer. He never brought foregone conclusions with him to spoil his powers of observation, and so he seldom went astray. But though he now saw as clearly as the day that something was wrong with his wife, and that that something was connected with Warton's visit, he had no more idea of suspecting her of concealing any secret of her own than he had of turning atheist. If he formed any conjecture at all, it was that Warton had been confiding to Myra some uncomfortable story connected with Warton's own household ; some family difficulty or debt or dispute, or something of that kind. "She will tell me all about it presently," he said to himself ; and he changed the subject. Perhaps he was a little disappointed when, during the night, his wife avoided any further allusion to it.

Now it had not escaped the keen loving eyes of Dr. Alwyn that a sort of change had been lately coming over his wife. Probably no eyes save his alone could have seen it ; but he saw it, and secretly sighed over it ; and the thought of it raised up a new barrier between him and the completion of his Flora. For it often now happened that during even the rare hours left him by his outer duties for labour at his own loved and long-delayed task, he laid down his pen, and consumed his brief precious time in barren and melancholy thought. "She is not happy now ; not so happy as she was :" thus ran the sad burden of his thoughts. He had noted a vaguely mournful and dissatisfied expression many times on her face ; he had heard her answer in tones that showed how *distracted* she was ; he had detected a querulous note in the voice that used to ring so musically and so cheerfully. Why was this ? At first—for Dr. Alwyn was not quite a simpleton—he set all this down naturally and satisfactorily to a very hopeful cause, and knew that when wives become suddenly a little moody, fitful, and capricious, husbands are not always supposed to have reason to mourn over these symptoms. But months passed away, and this conjecture died blankly out ; and Dr. Alwyn began sadly to think that he must ascribe Myra's melancholy to a very different cause. He began to think that she sorrowed silently over the empty quiver, each week and month making the hope that it might some day be no longer empty fade more and more. Dr. Alwyn and his wife were now nearly three years

married, and the laugh of an infant had not gladdened their home.

Did he never suspect that she began to find his love not enough for her—that she repented of her marriage with a man five-and-twenty years her senior? No; he had not suspected this. She met him now, as ever, with tenderness and affection; and his loyal manly soul was incapable of conceiving a suspicion—would have disdained to harbour it, even if it could have stolen its way in. That she should love him with the passion and glow wherewith a young wife meets a husband of years more nearly corresponding with her own, he did not expect. Let it be frankly owned, too, that few British men of Dr. Alwyn's age exactly want that sort of passionate love in a wife. They probably think such emotions irregular, unladylike, and un-English. Dr. Alwyn had nothing of the hero of romance about him; he was simply a good-hearted, manly, order-loving Briton. Our friend Shirley Brooks seems rather proud to tell us that the heroine of his *Sooner or Later*, being “a modest English girl,” and not a Frenchwoman, could never think of “flinging herself demonstratively on her husband's bosom and grappling him to her own, while she sobbed out a half-fierce, half-tender demand to know what rival had come between her and his love.” No, to be sure, that wouldn't be nice for a modest Englishwoman to do, would it?—that flinging herself on her husband's breast? Hardly proper, one might say. Some of us, of course, have natures not so well regulated; perhaps have a dash of some Celtic, or Oriental, or other fierce blood in our veins, and would like our wives all the better if, in some moment of doubt or fear or grief, they did thus fling themselves into our arms, and grapple us to their bosoms, and so forth. But it is only fair to say that Dr. Alwyn's ideas rather harmonized with those of Shirley Brooks, and he never expected to be suddenly grappled to his pretty young wife's bosom, nor did he feel called upon to do any such grappling business himself. Whereon we have only to remark—and of course the remark applies to the people in this story and to nobody else—that if Dr. Alwyn had this day of which we have been writing, or any previous day when he noticed distinctly the melancholy symptoms already described, just taken his young wife to his bosom, demonstratively and warmly, and put to her “the half-fierce, half-tender demand,” she would assuredly have burst into tears, have disburdened her mind of its

secret, have shown him frankly and faithfully her whole heart, and have saved much mischief—averted, perhaps, at least one calamity.

No word, however, was spoken which could have led to such a revelation. Myra brightened up during the evening, and came to think less of what had happened that day ; and Dr. Alwyn made up his mind to the belief that after all nothing very particular could have occurred—only, of course, he was a little sorry that his wife did not tell him all about it, whatever it might have been.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE PLATFORM.

“ I ONLY ask of you, my fellow Englishmen, that hearing which is not denied to the meanest criminal that ever quailed before the eye of justice.”

So, in tones loud, thrilling, and passionate, Walter Warton adjured a throng of his friends and whilom patrons, the working men, and adjured them in vain. Redoubled hisses, hootings, and groanings followed every effort, every appeal made by him to obtain a hearing.

This was at a great meeting of the working men, for the most part electors of the borough Warton meant to contest. The expected vacancy had arrived, and Warton was fairly in the field a candidate—thus far the sole candidate. He hoped, indeed, by striking a strong and decisive blow in the beginning, to scare away any other competitor ; and therefore he plunged at once at the heart of the constituency by calling together a mass-meeting of the working men. The meeting was held in a vast, drear, unadorned room, bare as a barn, resounding like a church—a temperance hall generally, an electioneering arena at periods of parliamentary crisis. The working men crammed the hall, and, to the utter amazement of Warton, greeted him when he came upon the platform with a perfect broadside of hisses and groans.

He came accompanied by a cluster of his friends. Captain Eastham, who was an elector for the borough, and was well known to everybody there, was his “ best man.” A whole dinner-party of Tory gentlemen from Eastham’s were with

him. Hamerfield, the Unitarian thinker, the philosophical Radical, who had Views of Life, and who happened to be spending a day or two at Eastham's, came too, having previously protested against being understood as identified by his presence with Warton's or anybody else's opinions—a protest rather surperfluous, inasmuch as outside a select circle in London nobody had ever heard his name, or knew or cared anything about his opinions. Shortsighted, delicate of feature, awkward, nervous, Mr. Hamerfield peered about him through an eye-glass, and made philosophical observation of everything, as if he were an astronomer trying to deduce new laws from inspection of some distant star-clusters. Ralph Lennon, too, appeared on the platform with Warton; Lennon not thinking it worth while to make any protest about his opinions, and not caring a single rush what deductions anybody made from his presence there. He sat a little behind the foremost group, apparently quite listless and apathetic, but in reality following the whole proceedings with close interest, and especially observant of Warton's demeanour.

Captain Eastham had been called on to preside, as an elector of the borough, one of the members for the county, very popular resident landlord, general favourite and good fellow. He was received with much applause, and said a few manly, hearty words, in which he invited a hearing for his distinguished and gifted friend—the friend of the working man, the true Englishman, the admired popular orator—Mr. Walter Raleigh Warton.

Except for the one ominous burst of hisses, there had been yet no token of public dissatisfaction with the friend of the working man, the true Englishman, and admired popular orator. Captain Eastham was about to invite with graceful gesture the popular orator to come forward, when a stentorian voice called from the back of the hall, "Captain Eastham!"

There was a dead silence. The gallant Captain came to the front, and indicated that he was ready to hear anything the Stentor wished to say.

"Captain Eastham, you're a Tory, ain't you?"

"I think my friends and neighbours here all know my political opinions pretty well. I have never concealed them. I am a Tory to the backbone!"

Some hisses began, which however the mass of the meeting drowned in encouraging cheers. The working men liked the Tory to be a Tory, and to say so. But the catechist went on:

"Then is your friend Mr. Warton a Tory to the backbone too?" (Shouts of laughter and uproarious cheers.) "Because, if he is, he needn't take the trouble to make any speech here. We don't want him."

Tremendous applause followed this hit, and stormy laughter. Captain Eastham smiled, and tried to recover his ground:

"My friend Mr. Warton is much better able to explain his political opinions than I can pretend to be. I should have thought you all knew him too well to require any explanation. I thought most English working men knew Walter Raleigh Warton."

"Yes, we know him *now*; we've found him out at last," roared Stentor; and new vociferations followed.

"This," continued Eastham, "is not a time for disunion, nor for squabbles about names of Tory or Radical. Our country is in danger; and to the enemy who threatens us we should stand shoulder to shoulder, not as Whigs and Tories, but as Englishmen. I have not asked my friend whether he shares my party opinions or not."

"Who's paying his expenses?" clamoured a new voice; and dire confusion set in.

"Captain Eastham!" again, at the first pause, yelled the original inquirer.

"Sir," replied the Captain, bowing politely to his wearisome questioner.

"Don't you think you've said enough now, Captain? Sit down, that's a good fellow, and let your friend speak for himself."

And Captain Eastham, thinking the advice on the whole very sensible and good advice, did resume his seat, after a few words of spirited but futile appeal on behalf of the abstract cause of fair play.

Thus far Warton had remained quietly sitting near Captain Eastham's presidential chair, calmly and blandly surveying the audience, and in his heart rather pitying poor Eastham for not being able to make anything of a popular meeting.

Warton quite enjoyed the prospect before him. He had immense faith in his own rhetorical powers, and revelled in the anticipation of a brilliant battle alone against tremendous odds; to be followed, as he felt convinced it must be, by a splendid victory. His pulses beat quickly, and the blood danced racily through his veins in joyous expectation of the coming

struggle between eloquence and numbers. He had talked over many a vehement meeting before, and turned hisses into hurrahs, and partisan foes into passionate admirers. His oratorical quiver was always richly filled with those dazzling arrowy commonplaces which have such a faculty for hitting the average intellect or heart fair in the bull's-eye, and which, even when they fail to hit the mark, leave at least, like the arrow of Acastes in the *Aeneid*, their sparkles of light behind them.

So he was quite pleased that the meeting should be allowed to ferment up a good deal before he came forward to speak. He only wished that Myra Alwyn could be safely seated somewhere in the hall, that she might see him go into the battle and singly carry all before him.

"The meeting seems rather turbulent, does it not?" whispered Hamerfield, leaning across to Warton, behind the back of the yet contending Eastham. "What will you do if they won't listen to you?"

"O, I'll prevail on them to listen to me, never fear!" was the calm and confident answer.

"Seem a very rough class of persons, Mr. Lennon, don't they?" said the philosopher, addressing his neighbour on the other side. "Now do you really think it would be quite statesmanlike to intrust the government of a country into the hands of such a class?"

"I think it would be a very wrong thing indeed," calmly responded Lennon; "but it is a comfort to know that nobody ever proposed to do it; and I don't suppose these men here could spare the time to govern the country, even if we asked them."

"No, of course, I don't mean that; but when I speak of government I mean the domination of a homogeneous majority. Don't you think a well-adjusted balance——"

"Yes; but when the man behind the counter keeps the adjusting of the balance all to himself, the outsiders are not always quite convinced of its correctness."

"Now then, Warton, I've had enough of it," said Eastham, as he fell back from the front. "There are some determined bawlers there, I can tell you. I've had my eye on some of them. The meeting is packed, I think; but go ahead."

"Give them fits, Warton," ejaculated one of Eastham's military guests encouragingly.

The time had come. Warton rose slowly, gracefully, from

his seat, bowed, flashed a rapid glance around the hall from side to side, and then advanced to the front of the platform. He always made it a point to look his audience steadily in the face before he began. Thus his quick eye was enabled to read in theirs a lesson which guided him in the choice of the tone he should take. He saw at once that there was something in what Eastham had said. The meeting was all against him, and was boisterously in earnest ; but scattered through the crowd, here and there, he saw faces with a peculiarly deliberate and business-like expression on them, as of men who had come to do a certain prescribed work, and who simply meant to do it. He saw many familiar faces too—faces of old friends and admirers in fustian jackets—faces that now looked most sternly at him. His heart a little sank.

“This will be a tough business,” he thought within himself.

“Three cheers for Walter Raleigh Warton !” cried the gallant Eastham, springing up and waving his hat.

Acclamation of well-meant vigour began among the group on the platform, but was literally swept away and drowned in a tempest and deluge of groans and hisses. Walter Warton waited calmly until the storm died away, and then began, with the old claptrap formula that had called up so many a cheer.

“Fellow Englishmen ! fellow working men !”

His clear, powerful, thrilling voice made these words soar over all clamour, and penetrate the farthest part of the hall. He had a magnificent voice, that was certain ; and, like Gretchen’s beauty, it was his undoing. But the words had hardly escaped his lips when the tornado of groaning, hissing, yelling, stamping, thumping with sticks, set in again, and it would be hopeless for any organ of human mould to prevail above such a Babel of sound. Warton’s lungs were not so good as his voice, and he always endeavoured not to overwork them. So he let the torrent sweep by, waiting quietly for his opportunity, and then began again—the same formula, evoking the same result. His words were a spell to bring down the thunder. Then, when he got the chance, he tried the appeal which opens this chapter, and it had no better effect. The faint and feeble sound which the best combination of cheering on the part of his friends on the platform could produce was hardly distinguishable, even in Warton’s ears, from the storm of indignant vociferation that beat upon him in front.

"Don't give in, Warton," cried Eastham. "Take it coolly. Let them tire themselves out."

"Some of the fellows are getting hoarse already, confound them!" said one of his friends.

But the Fabian policy was of no avail here. The "meeting" husbanded its lungs whenever the orator did. When Warton stopped, the audience—if one may use such a word of a mass of persons who were determined not to hear—stopped too. If Warton had been a conductor presiding, baton in hand, over a well-trained orchestra, he could not more effectively have dictated sound and silence in alternations than he did by first trying to speak and then for a moment remaining silent.

"The thing is all organized," said Eastham. "It's as clear as light."

Ralph thought it was too, and could not help conjecturing that he knew the name of the chief organizer.

Warton was quite cool as yet, and held well in hand the reins of his self-control. He turned calmly to his friends.

"There's no earthly hope of tiring these fellows out," he said; "the thing is all prearranged. I must try another plan."

Then he came to the front of the platform again, and fairly went at his speech, the tumult setting in at once with vehemence as uproarious as ever. But he went on declaiming, gesticulating with all the fluent force and ease of one who is carrying with him a captivated and sympathetic audience. He was, in fact, now trying his last chance. There are times when it is hopeless to attempt tiring out a hostile audience. This was such a time. When it becomes clear that the moment the orator stops to take breath, his foes will stop to take breath too, and that therefore their noise is not the mere inarticulate expression of fury, but the arranged and systematized mechanism employed for the express purpose of preventing him from being heard, then no experienced declaimer will think any longer of tiring out his tormentors. But there may be another chance for him. If he be really a distinguished speaker, a man of name and mark, whom people are curious to hear, he had better stream away with his speech, talking any rubbish he likes for the moment, and keeping the real oration back in readiness; and the chances are that many, or most, of his enemies will think they may as well hear a little of the orator if he positively is determined to have his speech out. To prevent him

from talking at all is, of course, the great thing ; but if he actually is talking, and will talk, why, it seems a kind of pity, doesn't it, that one should not, even for curiosity's sake, hear a little of it ? One appears to be, in a sort of way, losing the value of his time and money if he lets so much fine talking run right away and catches none of it. It is almost as great a temptation to a crowd as to see a beer-barrel burst in the street, and all the good liquor come streaming and foaming from the bung.

So Walter Warton declaimed away, striving no more to be heard above louder roarings than those which Demosthenes made the accompaniment of his sea-shore rehearsals. He talked away, unheeding all the noise. Sometimes through the storm a fragment of resonant sentence was drifted across the ears of Eastham and the group around him.

"Gad, it's a pity they won't listen or let us hear," said one of the party ; "he's making a splendid speech." He was, in reality, talking the merest rubbish ; revelling in absolutely unmeaning rhetoric. In fact, he was keeping the real speech until there should be some chance of its being listened to. Now could only be heard occasional scraps about England's hereditary glory and the malignant malice of an envious foe, and the imperative necessity of locking our shields, and rallying round the ancient standard of the Commonwealth of Britain.

But Warton's plan seemed wholly unavailing. If any momentary lull took place, deluding him into the hope that he might really begin *the* speech after all, some commanding voices at once resumed the cry, and the obedient clamour of a thousand throats combined in full volume again. Warton was getting wearied ; and, what was worse, he was losing his temper and becoming savage. Great beads of perspiration stood upon his white forehead, and after every sentence he bit his lips and set his teeth hard. He began to feel that he was being defeated, in full sight of the friends he had gathered round him to see his victory. The verdict of that meeting he knew would be fatal—a literal sentence of death to his hopes of the election ; but it was not that he now cared most about. It was the success of the immediate struggle in which he was now engaged. In that supreme moment he would have bought a victory over that brute inarticulate force of opposition at any sacrifice man could make.

Several times Captain Eastham jumped to his feet and claimed the exercise of his supremacy as chairman. He was always received with cheers and laughter, and good humouredly allowed to say his few words of vain appeal ; but then *da capo*. The storm set in as fresh as ever.

"Gad, I never saw such scoundrels," he exclaimed, as he resumed his chair of dignity, and wiped his forehead.

"Lots of them have sticks, too," said one of his friends. "Shouldn't wonder if there was an awful row here presently."

"I'd run the risk for the chance of smashing a few of the fellows' heads," mildly and very sincerely remarked another.

"Can't we have in the police?" suggested Mr. Hamerfield.

"Police? Nonsense!" laughed Eastham, who, in all his anger, rather enjoyed the affair; "what could half a dozen blue-coats do there? Besides, I suppose the blackguards are only exercising what they consider their constitutional rights as free British citizens."

"What care these roarers for the name of king?" placidly observed Lennon.

"It's no use, Warton," called the chairman to his struggling and now angry friend; "keep your breath, old fellow. Cicero couldn't do anything here. Give up—and shut up."

"Never!" screamed Warton, now excited to a kind of frenzy; "they shall hear me, if I stayed here all night."

The words which had broken into a shrill falsetto, pierced, rather unluckily, the ears of the crowd, and excited a wilder outburst of fury. "Pull him off the platform!" "Have him out!" "Turn him out!" "Pitch him into the street!" and other fierce cries, came from some of the mob behind, and soon began to have their effect on those in front; for some of them began to jump from their seats and flourish sticks and fists in alarming nearness to the platform.

"Oh, there will be a fight!" cried Hamerfield, turning pale as a ghost, and jumping up.

"Sit still, damn it! sit still," called out Eastham. "Don't show the white feather, unless you want them really to knock your brains out.—Don't be afraid, Warton. Pitch it strong into them, as you are at it."

Warton, however, was very pale. Most of Eastham's friends, stout young soldiers, sat like graven images, apparently as little disturbed by the menacing appearance of the crowd as if it were made up of school-girls.

Lennon happened to be the nearest to Warton, just a little behind. He watched very closely the looks of a few of the most demonstrative and fierce who were in the front of the crowd below.

"You had better finish," he said in a low tone to Warton. "There's nothing to be done here, and the sooner we effect a dignified retreat the better."

But Warton heard nothing, and in any case would not have heeded. The conflicting passions of rage and fear were maddening him. He shrieked and gesticulated at the crowd, and flung defiance and frantic denunciation at them. Suddenly one man mounted a stool and sprang right on to the platform, like the leader of a storming-party mounting a wall. Another, another, and another were following; and in half a moment a whole surge would have swept over the platform. But exactly at the critical moment Lennon leaped to his feet, and seizing the leader fairly by the shoulders, pitched him off the platform back on the heads of his followers, who tumbled beneath him to the floor, where they floundered and blindly scuffled with each other. Then Lennon stood in front of the platform coolly and good-humouredly, confronting the crowd amid the wild hurrahs of the young warriors behind him, who all leaped to their feet and waved their hats.

The moment was critical. Peace or war! riot or reconciliation? The decision was proclaimed in a moment by a spontaneous and universal outburst of Homeric laughter, and hurrahs as of jubilant Northern hero-gods. The crowd was at bottom thoroughly goodnatured and manly, and meant nothing worse than the stopping-up of Warton's rhetoric. They were immensely delighted with the pluck of the little knot of swells on the platform, and with Lennon's unexpected feat, and they cheered the hero and chaffed the overthrown besiegers with equal zest.

But when Lennon sprang to his feet, Captain Eastham leaped up too, for a different purpose. Lennon threw off Warton's assailant; Eastham caught Warton in his arms. Warton had fainted; fainted, and would have fallen back on the platform, but that his quick friend caught him. In a moment the fact became known, and all was wild confusion. There were the usual cries for air and shouts for a doctor, and wild asseverations of "He's dead!" "No, he isn't!" "Yes, he is!" and so forth. At last two or three of his friends lifted him into

the room behind the platform, while the others kept the crowd from pressing on. So he got air, and water was poured on him, and a doctor was sent for; but before this latter came Warton had opened his eyes and recovered his senses if not his strength.

"The excitement was too much for him," whispered Hamerfield to one of the young officers. "He is evidently of a highly nervous temperament. So am I."

"Funked, sir!" was the decisive answer of the warrior. "I saw it in his eye."

Warton was put into Eastham's carriage. Hamerfield and Eastham accompanied him. The rest of their friends had a drag. Lennon was nowhere to be seen. As soon as he had spoken to Warton and assured himself that the latter was all right again, he disappeared.

So ended the meeting which was to have made Warton's game. "Yes, I'm better now, Eastham, thank you," said Warton, in answer to an inquiry, as they drove away. "I am quite well, in fact. But I have lost the day; I have kicked down the ladder on which I meant to climb." And he sank, into profound silence.

CHAPTER XX.

DOUBLE DEFEAT.

FOR several days after the meeting and his signal defeat, Warton remained in a state of alternate excitement and depression. He sometimes astonished Eastham and the guests at Eastham's house by his reckless vivacity, and sometimes amazed them quite as much by his fits of despondency and silence. He drank wine far more freely than he was accustomed to do; and he played cards at night, and lost money and plunged into debt for it, and was going on one night to lose more and more, until Eastham positively interposed and would not allow it. His host set down his unusual excitement to the disturbance of his once promising election-prospects; but this was not the whole cause. The darker grew the horizon of his political hopes the fiercer burned the fires of his passion for Myra Alwyn. Had he succeeded in his other projects, he

might soon have forgotten her. But it was the law of his being to be always craving for new excitement ; and when disappointment came from one quarter, his restless heart instinctively grasped after another kind of hope in another direction. Just now it seemed that all earth could afford him no compensation and consolation for what he had lost but that which Myra Alwyn's voice might promise him. He sickened at the thought of home, and Mabel and the children, and the debts and the placid poverty. Anything to escape that. Better by far utter destruction ; better, at all events, any risk, any excitement.

He disappeared from Eastham's house for two or three days successively ; at least he did not show himself to anybody between breakfast and dinner. Weary and haggard, he returned in time to dress and appear at table, where, as we have said, he drank largely, and exhibited extraordinary alternations of mood. In fact, each day he hurried across the country, on horse or foot, to the edge of the lake, and watched for Myra Alwyn. He would not go to her house, for he feared to meet her husband, and to have to endure a vapid and passionless conversation.

The fourth day he was successful. He saw her leave the house alone. Had she gone towards the town, he would have been intensely disappointed. But she did not. She turned the other way, as if to skirt the lake in the direction where Lennon's house and his abortive Phalanstery lay. She walked very slowly, and Warton kept her in sight till she had passed a branch of roads, after which the path lay straight before her, and there was no possibility of her deviating from it. Then he scrambled across some fields and ridges and rocks, so as to intercept her, that he might not seem to have dogged her footsteps. When he had in full view that part of the road which she ought to have reached, he was surprised that he could not see her. At last he saw that she had seated herself on a little flower-grown rock or mound by the roadside overlooking the lake. These roads were to Myra as safe as Regent Street—nay, far safer. She walked or rode or lingered anywhere she pleased among the honest Cumberland folk without needing escort or provoking remark. She sat there idly, unconscious of the nearness of any observer. Her head was turned away from Warton, and he could only see her dark hair escaping from under her hat, and the curve of her neck as she looked

round to the water, and the light-coloured drapery that she wore. Her attitude was listless, and one might say melancholy. Warton stood for a while and gazed at her. The whole scene and the seated solitary figure were strangely suggestive of melancholy, and struck mournfully on the eyes and heart of the ruined man. The day was heavy, oppressive, and hot; the air was charged and surcharged with electricity. Within the last few minutes great masses of thundercloud were gathering in the sky. The surface of the lake had a pallid, leaden, and ghastly hue. The cry of a wild bird, as it flew across the mirror of the pale water, was the only sound that broke the funereal silence. Warton looked from earth to sky, and from sky to lake, and welcomed grimly the monotonous melancholy with which Nature seemed to sanction his own mood. Then his eyes rested again upon the one figure; and the meanness of his nature became almost idealised and made sublime by the force of the passion which in a moment filled it. "I am nearly ruined," he grimly thought; "I have nothing left; but I would welcome, not ruin—*that* I dread—but death, extinction, annihilation, if I could but believe that she, as she sits there, alone and sad, is thinking of me!"

He leaped from the little height on which he was standing, and called her name:

"Myra!"

Her head was turned away, and she did not hear. She still sat in the same attitude, gazing listlessly at the water, never thinking that she sat under the eyes of an observer; thinking of nothing less than of the man who was so near her, and whose shadow suddenly falling on her caused her to look up with a start. Something like alarm showed itself in her face when she saw Warton. He seemed excited and even wild in his demeanour. She was usually a fearless woman, but she did now cast an uneasy glance up and down the road, and saw that, save for her and him, it was a solitude.

"You did not expect to see me here, Mrs. Alwyn?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Warton; I thought you had returned to town. I was just going to visit a few poor people along the road, but I don't think I shall go now; it looks ominous of rain or a storm, I think."

She rose from her seat.

"Don't go just yet. Pray, don't. I have been here these

several days back—this is the fourth day—in the hope of meeting you. Myra, I must speak to you.”

“The last time I saw you, Mr. Warton, you promised me—you pledged me your word—that you would never speak in such a manner again. Am I to learn that you cannot keep your word?”

“Yes; you are to learn it—if you will—for it is true. If I made such a promise, it was idle; I could not keep it. I love you, Myra Alwyn—I love you like a madman! I think I am going mad.”

“I think you must be when you dare to speak to me in this way. Let me pass, Mr. Warton! Do not attempt to stop me.”

“You shall not pass, Myra, just yet.”

“I spared you before, Mr. Warton. I will not do so any more. I will expose you to the contempt and anger you deserve. Let me pass!”

He stood resolutely between her and her way home. She was not nearly so brave now as she pretended to be; and he saw hesitation in her eyes, and mistook its meaning.

“Why do you speak to me, Myra, in that harsh tone? Am I a robber? Am I a criminal? I love you, and I cannot help it. I would die for you—I would die with you delightedly. I wish the lightning that will flash soon from those clouds would kill us both. I do, indeed. Myra, can you not speak to me one kindly word—one word, to say you do not hate me? Look at me. I am a ruined man. My hopes are gone—my ambition is frustrated—my home is hateful to me. I am ruined. It would be idle, indeed, to seek the sympathy of many women on such grounds as these. They only care for success; but you are not like them, you can feel for me.”

“Mr. Warton, I did feel much sympathy with you, and friendly admiration for you, when I thought you were a man of honour and a Christian. Can you blame me if I feel differently now towards you?”

“But you are not a saint, thank Heaven! You are still a woman—too much of a woman to blame a man because he cannot help loving you. Do not think I did not struggle against this. I loved you from the first hour I sat by your side, when we only talked commonplaces, and I did not think we should ever meet again. But Fate has flung us together, and I yield to my destiny. No, Myra; you shall not go yet; not till I have relieved my soul by telling you all I feel.”

"Is there no use in appealing to your sense of honour?"

"None, none!"

He stamped his foot impatiently.

"Are you not a gentleman?"

He scanned her face eagerly, to discover if this was only a taunt. No; it was an earnest, indignant appeal.

"Myra Alwyn, let *us* at least not talk cant. Do you think I do not understand your nature? Do you think I cannot see that you are dissatisfied with your life, as I am? You are not happy; *you* have not found your place; your life is like my own—an unsatisfied blank, a void."

"My life," she said calmly, "is far better and happier than I deserve. It has until now been free from insult; it has been free from any contact with meanness and dishonour and wickedness. That must be my excuse for not having understood more readily the nature of a friendship like yours."

"Friendship between you and me! Folly! You did not believe it—you could not have believed it. I would sacrifice all the friends on earth for one warm word from you. Come, Mrs. Alwyn; you are, after all, a woman, with a woman's heart. You are young and beautiful, and—it is idle to deny it—unhappy. No, don't deny it. I saw it in your very attitude just now. You do not condemn me in your heart, because I have been drawn towards you and love you. I mean you no harm. I would kill myself rather than injure you or offend you."

"All this rhapsody, Mr. Warton, is thrown away on me. It does not even impose upon me; it only offends and humiliates me. Please to let me pass."

"No, I cannot—I will not! This may be my last opportunity of seeing you face to face. You must not leave this place, Myra, until at least you have spoken some word of pardon and sympathy—yes, and of hope."

He seized her hand. She gave a sudden scream of alarm, and indeed of pain; for his grasp was sharp and fierce. He covered her hand with kisses. She literally tore it from him. The dainty fingers were circled with many sparkling rings; and as she forced her hand from his, bright blood-drops trickled down, starting from the flesh which was lacerated in the struggle between his fierce pressure and her vehement resistance.

"Let me go," she said, her courage rising, like that of all

high natures, once the moment of trial had actually come. "I don't fear you in the least; I only feared *for* you when I thought you had yet something good in you. I hate and scorn you! No words of mine could express what I feel. You are a hypocrite and a coward, and everyone shall know it. I hear footsteps, thank Heaven! and I will ask the protection of the first man that comes this way, and denounce you to him."

Warton knew now that she was in earnest. He stood motionless, torn internally by anger, disappointment, and love. He too heard footsteps: a moment and someone must come round the sharp curve of the road and appear in sight. Then, would she really dare to carry out her threat and make a scene and expose him? He would have escaped—literally fled—if there were any use in so base an expedient. As it was he stood at bay, his heart throbbing, his eyes riveted on the curve of the road.

And she stood resolute, with clenched fingers and sparkling eyes and pale cheeks—a pretty picture for anyone who could just then have appreciated its artistic points, but one which Warton did not venture to look on.

In a moment a man's figure showed itself at the curve of the road, and Ralph Lennon lounged slowly on. His eyes were on the ground.

Both Warton and Myra instinctively started and turned away. Warton was about to say, "For God's sake spare me this!" when his eyes fell upon her, and the words died on his lips. For he saw that her figure, her attitude, her hands had relaxed, and that her cheeks were covered with burning blushes. Then she began to walk rapidly, though with uncertain step, in the direction of her home. Warton walked unforbidden by her side; his teeth were set hard, and he spoke not a word. They reached the junction of the roads, one of which branched towards Dr. Alwyn's; and they took that way. They still walked side by side. At last she looked back. Lennon had passed on the other way. They were again alone; but her house was now in sight. She then stood still and looked at Warton; but there was not the same resolution in her tone as she spoke to him now.

"I have spared you a second time—perhaps I have again done wrong; but do not this time misunderstand my motive. I detest, I despise you."

"I do not misunderstand your motive," replied Warton, in

a slow undertone of bitterness and deep passion. "I understand it now only too well. I saw it in your cheeks and in your eyes when he, Lennon, came near! Yes, I knew well before this that you were unhappy, but I did not see to the bottom of your heart, and find the cause there. Perhaps I suspected this too; but now I know it. Will you give me your hand in parting, Myra?"

"No," she exclaimed, passionately; "your last calumny is worse than all;" and tears flashed up in her eyes. "What have I done to you, Mr. Warton, that you thus persecute and insult me?"

He still stood between her and her house; and the place, which was in one sense a protection to her, was in another way a sort of immunity to Warton. He knew she would hardly make a scene under the eyes and windows of her own house, and he therefore ventured quietly to detain her. But his manner was quite changed; he spoke with no vehemence now.

"Myra, you have destroyed me; only that! You have given me Fate's final blow. But, believe me, I am not so wholly bad as you think me. I am not incapable of sympathy and of respect. We are both unfortunate; only I know from what I have now seen that you resist your temptation and will conquer it, while I have yielded to mine and betrayed myself, and lost even your respect. One word: keep my secret, as I will yours. Since an evil fortune has thus flung us together, and thus exposed one to the other, let us at least not betray each other. Good-bye. I don't ask you any more to forgive me, and you will not ask me to forget you."

He withdrew from her path, and without speaking a word she passed on. It need hardly be said that she did not look behind. He remained motionless for a while, and gazed fixedly after her; then he lifted his hand into the air, as if he waved with the gesture a sort of farewell to the place and its associations and hopes, and he took rapidly the road that led to the town. Soon the storm which had been threatening so long broke into thunder and flame, and drenching rain shrouded the lake and the whole scene in a curtain of mist. He took refuge in a small hotel or tavern, the first that presented itself. Thence he wrote and despatched a note to Eastham, announcing that he had received some sudden news which obliged him at once to return to town, asking that his luggage might be sent

on, and apologising briefly for his hasty and unceremonious departure.

"And so all that chapter closes," he bitterly thought. "I may bid farewell to hopes of any kind there. My career is done. Debt and difficulty now swallow me up. One chance only is left—if that fails I don't care what Fate does with me."

In fact Walter Warton accepted one defeat at least: he gave up the idea of contesting the borough of Northingen. His friends frankly told him it was hopeless; and he submitted to what he called Fate.

CHAPTER XXI.

SUDDEN HOPE—SUDDEN DISAPPOINTMENT.

TWO women—the same two who watched and waited for Mr. Warton in an early chapter of this story—watched and waited for him in the same place now. But with one of them at least a change had taken place—a change so profound and organic that she seemed to herself not merely to stand upon the threshold of a new life, but to approach it a new being. In all the world that lay under the stars that summer evening, it is doubtful if any heart swelled with a deeper, more thrilling, more fearful joy than the heart of Grace Ethelstone.

She had hidden herself the greater part of the day, to be alone with her happiness—to get accustomed to it—to become able to bear its effulgence—to school herself down, that she might not burst into wild raptures about it—to learn to regard it as real—to learn how to conquer the fears and doubts which its very brightness brought with it. Since Jupiter consented to gratify Semele by appearing in all the radiant joy of his celestial presence, and destroyed the poor little fond mortal, human creatures seldom hear of the approach of a great happiness without some doubt and fear. Behind happiness treads always its shadow.

Grace Ethelstone had received that morning a letter from Ralph Lennon. He had cast the die; and the principal part of the letter ran thus:

"Can you, then, love me? and will you marry me? I come straight to the question—to me a most momentous one. I

write that you may calmly and alone think over it, and ask your own heart, and obey its answer. I would not take you by surprise, or pain you, or persecute you ; but if you could love me, Grace, I think I could make you happy. I am nearly twice your age, very likely : and what I am, you see ; and I have beaten about the world too much to have a great deal of the bloom of life left on me. I was a digger in Australia when you were hardly out of your cradle, and I had lived many lives even before that, and have since ; and with all my experience I have learned nothing of myself or of others that is half so precious and full of hope to me now as the conviction—yes, indeed, the conviction—that if you can love me, I can make you happy. Will you have me ?

“I will come to London and see you the day after you receive this. That time will be long enough, I hope, for you to determine, and long enough for me to remain in suspense. And I would ask you not to speak of this to anyone until you have seen me. I want your own decision, Grace, and no one else’s. If you can love me, that is all.”

Now this was not a love-letter in the ordinary style. It contained no impassioned words. It was not the language in which a young man pours out to his sweetheart his burning hyberbolical passion. Strangely enough, it did not contain one single protestation of Lennon’s own love. Yet Grace hoped and believed that she perfectly understood it. Lennon wrote under the impression that his love for her was transparent, and not to be doubted. She thought she could see in it, too, the evidence of that proud and sensitive nature which she knew him to possess—that nature which disdains hyperbole as much as it scorns to hide its own supposed demerits or disadvantages. Not even for his love would Lennon condescend to the cajolery of mere words. His soul shone in the letter. “I love you, as you know by my asking you to love me :” there was the whole.

So she felt as she kissed the letter, and shed warm tears over it, and thought every sentence of it opened up a heaven over her life which hitherto had been so dull and hopeless. Yesterday, she was a poor girl, living the dreariest and most monotonous of existences ; feeding on her own heart—a lonely atom in the universe. Now, she was a woman, loved, and passionately loving ; offered happiness by one with whom she would have gladly encountered even misery. She could only

hide herself away, while she strove to grow familiar with the reality.

Doubts there were of course. Could she make him happy? He was a scholar; a thinking man, who had seen life in many shapes—had wandered, and struggled, and suffered; and whose mind had ranged through a whole zodiac of experiences—of books, of nature, of life, of thought. Could she be a companion to him? Could her thoughts and ways have any interest for him? Could she read his books, and follow his ideas? Might he not come to be sorry in the end that he had ever married her? Might he not grow tired of her, and find her dull, and wish he had married someone better, or remained unmarried?

But she answered all this firmly and decisively. No; it was impossible. If Ralph Lennon loved her now he would love her always. She was already to herself an authority and a dogmatist on love. On this one subject she was inspired and infallible: as the young mother who was at school the year before last, and whose first baby was born a week ago, is already convinced that she understands from first to last, and with a knowledge not to be borne down by any authority, the whole science and practice of the management of infancy.

No, Grace had nothing to consider; she wanted no hours for reflection—reflection was over and done. If Ralph Lennon stood there just now she could only fling herself into his arms. She was too much in love to think of any of the coqueties of courtship; and—let us do justice to her and to him as well—she never once bestowed a thought upon the fact that she was poor and that he was rich. She totally forgot his money and her poverty. It never would have occurred to her to think that he cared whether she was poor or rich.

So she only waited for him to come to give her answer. She did not dare yet to trust herself to talk to Mabel Warton upon any subject; indeed her cheeks and eyes just now were very red, and she had not Sophy Streatfield's delightful art of crying without disfiguring herself. She felt some remorse about hiding half the day from her aunt and the children; but she could not go into the light just yet. She heard little Watty's voice calling for her all over the house; but she made no answer. At last he came and hammered lustily at the door. For a while she remained quiet; but he continued to knock and call. "It is a shame," she thought, "to keep the poor little child there, and to disappoint him." So she opened the

door, and Walter stormed into the room impetuous and excited.

"O, cousin Gracie, I didn't know where you were, and I do want you so much! O, look at my sword—do look at my sword! I've smashed the hilt right off it, and I can't mend it; can you? I've tried ever so much and I can't mend it; and O, I am so sorry for my sword!"

Grace caught him in her arms, and lifted him up, and kissed him many times, and stammered out, half smiling, half sobbing:

"O, you dear little Watty, you shall have a sword twice as fine as this, and a gun, and a spear, and anything else you like; and you shall be as happy as a little king!"

Watty opened the eyes of wonder even more than of delight.

"But who'll give them to me, Gracie dear?"

The little man's simple knowledge of the resources of the family, and its limited power of conferring splendid gifts, was an honest and timely corrective of enthusiasm. Somehow Grace felt herself blushing and growing shame-faced at the straightforward inquiry.

"O, you'll see, Watty; somebody will give them."

"But I don't know," said Watty, still dubious—"I don't know, Gracie, who *could* give them. Papa isn't here, and nobody gives me anything but you and Mr. Lennon; and you told me yesterday you couldn't give me anything for a while; and it was a ship I asked Mr. Lennon to bring me, and not a sword."

"Yes; but some other time perhaps, you little unbelieving, practical, cross-questioning small boy: I promise you a fine sword; take my word for it. But in the mean time let us see if we can't do anything to mend this murderous weapon you have got here."

The mending of the sword was accomplished somehow; a mangled matter at the best, it did not seem at all artistic or military to little Watty. But it gave Grace some time to collect her senses, and to pour the cold water of common duties upon the glowing fervour of her happiness.

Meanwhile Watty told his mamma how kind cousin Gracie was—that she had promised him a splendid sword, that she was mending his broken weapon, and that she cried when he told her it was broken.

"You silly boy, what nonsense!" said his mamma. "Cousin

Grace cried because your little sword was broken ! How could you get such a ridiculous idea into your head ? ”

“ Why, but indeed mamma she did ! She regularly burst out crying—not roaring, you know, as Maby sometimes does ”—and Walter laughed at the absurdity of his own comparison—“ but crying quietly. I saw the tears in her eyes and running down her cheeks too. Look, here she comes ; ask her.”

“ Why, Grace, this little goose says you began to cry because his sword was broken ! ”

Grace laughed merrily at the idea. “ No, not exactly for that ; but—” and the tears came up and sparkled in her eyes again ; and Mabel looked wistfully at her, but asked no more questions.

Evening came on at last, and it brought a calmer and more self-possessed mood to our happy girl. Mabel had been expecting Warton these two or three evenings, and felt convinced he must be coming now ; and so they waited for him in the little garden in front of the house. There was no talk now, as there used to be, of going to the railway station to meet him. His comings had been of late so irregular and so rare that even Mabel had given up all habit of thus forming herself and her niece into a guard of honour to receive him and escort him home.

The two women walked up and down, while the children played on the grass. Grace felt unusually warm and tender to Mabel, whom she seemed now about to leave. She thought with the deepest pity of the poor, fond, weak woman whom she, hurrying to her own happiness and love, was to leave behind her to an ever-deepening shadow of difficulty or sorrow. She thought with a sensitiveness of penitence approaching to remorse that she had often been impatient or weary of Mabel's gentle ways and placid weakness ; that she had often felt a contempt for her, and sometimes gone near to expressing it. Almost as one feels towards the dying, she felt to Mabel, whom she was about to leave behind ; and she longed to throw her arms round her neck and kiss her, and beg to be forgiven for any chance impatience or passing ebullition of temper in the irrevocable days gone by.

They walked a few turns in silence. At last Mabel said :

“ I don't know, Gracie, how it is ; but I grow more and more anxious about Walter. He looks so thin and worn ; and I am sure he has something very heavy on his mind. He will

not talk about it to me, nor tell me anything if I ask him. He is so kind and considerate that he thinks it would pain me to hear of anything uncomfortable ; and of course it would, dear ; and you know how poor my nerves are, and always were, Grace, since I was a child. But I think it's so much worse when one isn't told, don't you ?—for then one keeps imagining the most dreadful things."

"Well, dear, you know that Walter is very busy and anxious just now about his election, and all that ; and men must feel excited and anxious about these things in a way that we perhaps can't understand. But that will be all settled soon."

"Yes ; but I fear it's more than that. It's a terrible thing, Grace, to think that your husband has some secret weight upon his mind which you are to know nothing of. O, my dear, I hope you will never have to think and brood over such a thing. And a woman ought to know her husband's troubles. The Bible itself says she ought to be his helpmate ; but O, Grace, I never think of the words without remembering that I am not my poor Walter's helpmate : I never was. It's not my fault ; at least I can't do any better, for I don't understand the things that occupy him. But I often, often think what a pity it is poor Walter ever saw me. He might have married some clever woman, who could have understood him and helped him on, and not been a mere drag and clog on him as I have been ; or he might even have married some woman with money, and that would be something. Do you know, I sometimes think it would be a happy thing if I died now, while he is still young ; for then he might find some one to marry him who could understand him and be a help to him."

"Dear Mabel, you must not think of such dreadful things. Surely nobody could be more attached to Walter than you are."

"No, indeed, nobody could ; nobody on earth could be more attached to him than I am. But what good is that ? A little dog would be fond of him too. A man wants something better than that : he wants his wife to be a companion and a helpmate."

Grace could hardly answer ; indeed, she knew nothing to say which could have any soothing effect. She tried some weary old commonplace about the difference between men's and women's nature, and failed to get through with it. Mabel went on :

"I become so fearful too. I am always thinking that something

will happen to him—that he will fall sick somewhere miles and miles away, and die, perhaps, before I see him. You remember poor Mrs. Archdale, who lived in Crown Villa below? Her husband was away somewhere—in Dublin or Edinburgh, I think—and one day she got a telegram to say that he had died suddenly; and she had hardly recovered from the faint she fell into, when there came a letter by post from him, in his own handwriting, to say that he was coming home immediately, and was longing to see her, and that he was well and happy, and hoped to find her so. And it was such an agony, for in her bewilderment she thought at first that the telegram must be a mistake, until she remembered that it was despatched hours and hours after he had posted his letter; so she had only a second shock, and the knowledge of her misery twice over. And he was dead sure enough. I often think something of the same kind will happen to poor Walter.”

“But, dear Mabel, Walter is not in bad health, and there is nothing at all to give you any uneasiness about him.”

“Do you really think so, Grace, or are you trying merely to allay my fears? Do you really think there is nothing very dreadful on his mind?”

“Indeed I think there is nothing very dreadful. I fancy he is in some little difficulty about money just now to meet his expenses; and I think it is such a pity he should place himself in any difficulty of the kind when he has so much talent, and ought to be independent of political parties and patrons. But I don’t believe there is anything worse than that disturbing him—I don’t indeed.”

“I am glad to hear you say so—it comforts me. I do wish I could see him out of these dreadful money difficulties. I am ashamed to say it, Grace, but I look at every newspaper that comes in the hope of seeing an announcement of the death of that hideous old aunt of mine, that frightful old Jane Ethelstone—just because there is a faint possibility that she might leave me or the children a few thousand pounds. I don’t think she will. I know she wouldn’t give us a farthing; and I have not spoken to her or heard from her for years; but when people are dying they get softened sometimes, and perhaps she might think of me and the children.”

Grace laughed at the remembrance of the fearful old person alluded to.

"I am quite sure she'll never leave *me* anything, Mabel ; and indeed I shouldn't like to take a farthing of her wretched money. Let them sew it all up in a sack and bury it, and put a stone over it to say, 'Here lies the soul of Jane Ethelstone,' as they did with somebody in *Gil Blas*. I don't care. She detests me—she considers me a lost girl ; she told me so when I boldly told her I meant to go to Rome and be an artist. She asked me sarcastically whether I would not become a ballet-dancer, or take to wearing trousers ; and she wound up by saying that I was a disgrace to my family, and I think she added to my sex ; and she requested that when I became a sign-painter or a tombstone-cutter I would do her the favour to forget that I was a relative of hers—which I have been trying to do ever since."

"Well, my dear, she is a very disagreeable old woman ; but I could forgive her all if she just turned good-natured in the end, and left me something to help my poor Walter with. O, how glad I should be to give it to him, and to bring him out of all his vexations and troubles !"

"Now, Mabel, I am the first to be of good omen, and to bring you good news. Look up ! Your alarms about Walter are over for one night at least—for see, here he comes."

And so he did. Grace's eyes had discovered him a long way off. He was coming on with rapid strides. He looked dusty and weary. Mabel was already signalling him with waving hands. He nodded, and then turned his eyes downward again.

"Here's papa, Watty !" said Mrs. Warton joyfully to her little son.

"O," said Watty, looking up, "shall I run to meet him, mamma ?"

The child was rather doubtful, and not at all anxious. Papa came so seldom now, and played with Watty so little, that his presence had long ceased to create any storm of delight.

"Yes, dear, certainly."

But Watty began to make some disposition of his playthings before he started ; and the result was that his papa was at the gate while the boy was still on the grass. Mabel threw herself into his arms. Walter brushed her cheek with his lips, and replaced her quietly on her feet. He also kissed

the children and Grace, and then said he was very tired, and had dined, and only wanted some tea, and took Mabel indoors.

"You look very tired, Walter dear," said his wife, when they were alone, "and you seem unwell. Where have you been ; and I hope nothing is the matter ?"

"Nothing," he replied wearily, "except the old story."

"The old headache and faintness, dear ?" she inquired, with alarm in her tones.

"No, no. At least I don't care about that. But I am dreadfully embarrassed for money, Mabel ; and if I don't get some within a few days, I shall be in prison and ruined—that's all."

"O, what a dreadful thing ! What are we to do ? O, if I could do anything to help you, my dear Walter !"

"Yes, if you could, of course you would do it ; but then you can't, and I don't see much use in talking about it."

"If that cruel old Jane Ethelstone would only help us, or would only die and leave us some of her wretched money !"

Walter shrugged his shoulders. He had been hearing of old Jane Ethelstone almost ever since he saw Mabel first ; and there was no reason why she should die now any more than during any of the next dozen or twenty years, and no reason why they should expect anything from her, even at her death.

"That's the state of affairs, Mabel," he said, as he dropped languidly into a chair and leaned his chin upon his hand. "It has been threatening a long time, and now the end is close upon us. I am nearly ruined. And yet it would not take a great deal to help me over this difficulty, and enable me perhaps to come all right and make my way yet. A mere handful of money, as a rich man, Mabel, would think it—a mere handful would make us all happy."

It was "us" with Warton just now. "I" had all the pleasure, and schemed out the plans, and was to benefit by the success ; "we" shared the failure, and were burdened with the task of reparation.

"How much, Walter ?" his wife asked timidly.

She was thinking, it is to be feared, that Grace would soon have fifty pounds coming to her, and wondering whether that would do any good, and whether it would be too great a shame to borrow it from her.

"Only a trifle, in fact. Eight hundred, or at all events a thousand pounds, would bring me through for the present."

Eight hundred or a thousand pounds! Poor Mabel's countenance utterly fell. A thousand pounds for the present? As well say twenty thousand, fifty thousand, half a million, at once.

"O, Walter dear, what a great sum of money! at least it seems great to me, dearest"—she saw him frown, and hastened to lower her tone of alarm—"because I cannot give it to you or get it for you. I am sure I don't know anybody on earth who could lend it except Jane Ethelstone, who wouldn't give it if we were all in the workhouse; and of course except——"

"Except whom? Speak quickly, Mabel."

"Well, darling, except Ralph Lennon. But then, you know, he has obliged us once already."

This was the very point Warton wanted to bring her to. He did not like to appear, even in her eyes, as if he had been planning an assault on Lennon's purse.

"Yes, that is true. I had quite forgotten Ralph Lennon. How strange that you should have thought of him!"

"No, not so strange, dear, when he has always been such a friend." Mabel was rather proud of having taken the initiative in thinking of anything. "I know of course that he would do it if we asked him; but I did not know whether you would like to do so."

"Listen, Mabel. As you have mentioned Lennon's name, I have something to speak to you about which concerns him. How do you think Grace feels towards him?"

"O, Walter, I'm sure I don't know. I never asked her."

"No; but I thought all women had sharp eyes and quick senses for that kind of thing. Do you think she cares about him—loves him?"

"I don't know whether she has any feeling of that kind. She was angry once when I merely jested about the probability of his marrying her."

"Would she marry him if he asked her?"

"I dare say she would. I don't see why she should not. I am sure it would make me very happy if she did, though I should be sorry to lose her. But does he love her, Walter?"

"That I don't know. I am sure he has a sincere affection for her—a friendship, you understand; and I feel convinced

he would marry her if he got the slightest encouragement. I don't suppose a man like him, who has long ceased to be a boy, thinks very much about romantic love when he goes to marry a girl. Grace would suit him admirably. She is a clever girl, with tastes much like his own; and he would soon get to love her quite as much as is necessary."

"It would be a very good thing for her. It would provide for her, poor child; but I should like him to love her, Walter."

"Yes, yes, of course. So he would, no doubt; perhaps he does already. It would be a good thing for her, Mabel; and it would be a good thing for him too; and any true friend of his ought to be glad to see it brought about. It might save him from folly, or danger."

"My dear Walter, save him from what?"

"I don't like to say, or even to hint; but I can't help observing. He lives too near—Myra Alwyn" (the name came out with a strong effort); "and by Heaven I think she is in love with him!" He brought the declaration out in a burst of vehemence, and then ground his teeth and clenched his hand.

"O, Walter, how you frighten me! O, what a wicked woman she must be!"

He glared at her savagely, and was on the point of making some fierce answer; but he checked himself, and only said:

"My dear, we must not judge our fellow-creatures in that way. I said I thought or feared this; but I did not even suspect anything more than a feeling on Mrs. Alwyn's part; and I don't wish you, however virtuous yourself, to run quite into the worst extreme in condemning her. That may be the way of the world, Mabel; but it need not be our way."

"Of course you are right, Walter—you always are; and I am sorry I spoke in that hasty uncharitable way; but you are always so good and charitable and Christianlike. Only it shocked me when you spoke of a married woman—and a clergyman's wife too!—being in love with anybody not her husband. O, Walter dear, is it not shocking to think of married people having any such wrong feelings?"

"Dreadful, dreadful, of course. But now we are only talking of possibilities, you know, and of guarding against dangers. I think a girl like Grace might be the means of saving from any possibility of danger a man like Lennon; and might be the

means, too, of saving others and securing much happiness. I think you might have a share in such a good work, by using your influence over her to persuade her to see things in that light. There, that is all; and all this, Mabel, came of your having suggested the name of Ralph Lennon as that of our only friend."

"Yes, dear; and in your anxiety about your friend you have forgotten all about yourself. Just like you! O, I too should so like to render any service to dear old Ralph! What a dreadful world it is! I think it would be the happiest thing that could befall Grace Ethelstone if she were to become an instrument in the hand of Providence to avert such dangers and calamities. But about your own affairs, love? Shall we ask Ralph to—to come to our aid again?"

"Might it not be done, think you, through Grace? Might not she bring it about in some indirect way, if what we have talked of should come to pass? Would not that be rather a more delicate way, perhaps? And don't you think she would herself be glad to be the means of serving us—I mean, of serving you and the children?"

"I don't know, dear. Grace is the best-hearted creature in the world; there is nothing of her own she would not give. But she has strong ideas of independence, and all that. Girls have such wild romantic notions, and don't know, until they go into the world and have a family, what a dreadful thing it is to want money, and how people have to humble themselves to get it." Poor Mabel sighed. "But I think she would not mind doing this, if things went on as we hope they may."

"You can put it to her in some way, can you not, dear, to-night—not broadly or directly, but rather as a vague suggestion?"

"I will put it to her, and do my best. If I cannot get her to see it my way, then——"

"Then, of course, I will go directly and frankly to Ralph Lennon myself, and ask it of him openly as a favour. It is not, after all, such a great matter. But I had rather the request did not come directly from me—or indeed directly, as a request, from anybody."

This was Warton's process of reason: "Lennon is a strange, eccentric, independent, generous man. Let him but be induced to think that I, Walter Warton, struggling terribly with difficulties, would rather break down utterly than acknow-

ledge the fact to him and even seem to ask for help, and he is just the sort of creature to do something spontaneously of the most generous and delicate nature."

He did not want Grace to ask Lennon's help ; he did not expect or wish her to do it. Let but Mabel convey to Grace a clear idea of the difficulties that surrounded them, and Grace only allow a hint of them to escape her lips to Lennon, and enough would be done.

Warton now was impatient and ardent to bring about an engagement between Grace and Lennon. He spoke at least some of his true feelings to his wife. He wished to see Lennon removed out of the path of the Alwyns into the cloud and distance of married life ; and it was always his fate to be too clever by half. Had he let things alone, all would probably have gone just as he wished ; but he was not satisfied without employing the agency of an additional stimulus alike to Mabel and to Grace.

His wife fulfilled her mission that night. How it succeeded he knew when she came with pale face and tearful eyes into his room. How it succeeded he would have known still better could he have looked into Grace's bedroom, and seen her stretched, half kneeling, half lying, on the floor, her head pressed against the side of her little bed, and her figure shaken with cruel sobs and spasms of grief. The beautiful world of the morning and the day was all shattered to pieces. It had collapsed and disappeared. The old similitude which likens human hope to the child's soap-bubble impressed its truth in letters of fire on the heart of Grace Ethelstone.

For poor Mabel had gone about her task in the way that of all others was the most distinctly doomed to frustrate it. First, she appealed to Grace to help Walter and the children and herself out of their difficulties, until Grace flushed and shivered at the thought of trafficking in Lennon's love and her own, and she and Mabel seemed like mean conspirators laying traps to catch a wealthy suitor. But that was nothing compared with what followed. Mabel went on to plead for Ralph himself ; and, warming with her subject, she described him as one whom the spells and snares of another Venusberg were threatening, and whom only a good wife could redeem. She alluded passingly, but too suggestively, to Lennon's earlier years, and his real or supposed follies, as they had been purposely pictured to herself one well-remembered time ; and at last she succeeded

in conveying to Grace's startled mind the idea of a mission assigned to her against which every pulse of her heart throbbed with antagonism. She was then merely appointed to "redeem and release from love that recalls and represses" one who had "loved too soon," and "lost love's rose, and cared not for glory's." Her idol, her hero, her one high-souled man, was the creature to whom she was thus to minister! Her own life so far had taught her a dread, a dislike, and a contempt of men. Her father had been weak and wild, and would probably have made his home unhappy, but that he had the good fortune to die young. Warton she saw through to the selfish sensuous heart, and despised. To her girlish fancy, repelled by such men as she had chiefly known or heard of, Lennon rose up at last a sort of knight without reproach. And now he was pictured to her as just like the rest; and she was urged to marry him because he was like the rest! Her sense and spirit rose in revolt, and overcame. Her life, in its intellectual part, had been lonely so far; and solitude always strengthens a soul which it cannot enfeeble. Her soul was strong enough even for this sacrifice. She knew that the decision she was making was the fate of her life's whole happiness; but she decided. She said not much to Mabel; not much, but enough. When she was left alone she read Lennon's letter over and over again, now with other eyes than those which judged it in the morning. "This, then," she sobbed to herself, "is the kind of love that even he can offer! Rather than accept it I would die—O, my God, rather than accept it, I will even live—alone!"

CHAPTER XII

"THOU SHALT RENOUNCE."

IT was a fierce and fitful summer day—a day of thunder and drenching showers, alternating with sudden and burning sunlight—when Ralph Lennon, who had come to London the previous night, left his old quarters at the Eleanor's Cross Hotel for the train which was to carry him to Grace. His mind naturally went back to the bright day—not so long ago—when he saw her for the first time, and called her "Mabel," seeing in her the reflection of that pale past love now faded

below the horizon of his life, and only remembered because of its refraction. Insensibly had grown upon him since that time the love he felt towards Grace, and which he now knew to be the one true passion of his existence. It had not flashed upon him like the concentrated rays from the burning-glass, but had grown warmer and brighter by degrees, commanding his intellect and his sympathies as well as his heart, and subduing him at last by the dear, tender, familiar glow of habit. For months and months she had occupied a daily increasing part of his thoughts, even before he had come to recognize the fact that he loved her or had formed any clear hope of winning her love. All the special objects he had in view when he came back to England had disappeared, or proved failures. He had tried to do good, and failed utterly, and was only regarded with distrust or contempt where he thought to be a benefactor. He had resolved to lead a sort of anchorite life; and, behold, he had fallen in love, and was about to marry. He thought his years of sentiment and passion had gone for ever; and, lo, he was a boy again, in feverish hope and fitful alternations of doubt and joy; and he could almost tremble as he felt in anticipation the touch of a girl's hand—a girl who was in her cradle when he was passionately and vainly pleading his first love. Could it be that the brightness of a life which seemed to have passed its meridian was only dawning for him? And if he should fail, what then remained? He shut this thought from him. It could not be.

He grew intensely nervous as the train ran into the station. But his nervousness gave way to surprise and excitement when he saw Grace Ethelstone on the platform. There was no one else there except the porters and the station-master, and Lennon was the only one who got out of the train. He sprang towards Grace, and called her by her name. She gave him her hand in silence, and it trembled as he touched it. She was very pale—he could see this even through the veil which she kept down—and her eyes looked as if long tears had wasted them. His heart sank. This looked not like a wedding.

"Has something happened?" he asked excitedly.

"No, Mr. Lennon—nothing," she answered. "Pray don't think it strange if you find me here, and I tell you that I came to meet you. I did—I felt anxious that you should not come to the house. I wished to speak to you here, or anywhere—not there—and so I waited for you here."

"You have received my letter, Grace?" He spoke slowly and heavily.

"I have."

"And you have come here to answer it?"

"Yes, Mr. Lennon."

He knew that he must prepare to hear the worst. He controlled his emotion with a strong effort, and offered her his arm to leave the station. The train had gone its way, and they were under the eyes of the few railway officials. He meant to lead her to the road outside, but she said :

"There is a waiting-room here, Mr. Lennon, and there is no one there ; will you let me speak to you there for a moment?"

She spoke with a childlike simplicity and unreserve. He went with her into the dull little waiting-room, furnished with a stony sofa, two rigid chairs, and a table on which nothing ever rested but carpet-bags, and adorned with a few pictorial advertisements of Brighton hotels and Yorkshire hydropathic establishments. It was lonely, dark, and silent as a little vault.

There was just a moment's pause. Lennon would have given anything that he could break out into a storm of passionate appeal and protestation, but her sad expression and tone chilled him. She broke the silence :

"Your letter, Mr. Lennon, was a surprise to me; but I thank you deeply for all you have said in it. I can never forget how kind and good you have been, and I hope you will believe that I always appreciate your motives ; but I cannot accept your offer, and I thought it best to come and meet you here at once, and frankly tell you so."

"But you will tell me, you must tell me, something more than this. You will tell me—no matter in what words ; the harder the better—why you have resolved so suddenly to refuse me."

"Ah ! I have no hard words of any kind to speak to you ; but I cannot marry you, Mr. Lennon—O, how I wish I could !"

The simplicity of this avowal, accompanied by a sudden rush of tears into Grace's eyes, bewildered Lennon, and at the same time made his heart throb with the quickening of a new hope. He caught her in his arms.

"Thank God for that word, Grace ! I will not listen to any more denials ; I have heard enough. I don't care what

difficulties or objections you may think you see, you shall be my wife ; I will never leave you.”

She disengaged herself quietly, and said : “No, Mr. Lennon, it cannot be. Don’t think me a mere silly girl, to refuse only that I may be pressed into consenting ; my mind is fixedly made up. Only the heart knows its own bitterness !—only I myself can know what it has cost me to have to make this resolve. But I tell you truly what I have determined to do, and you will not—I appeal to you—make me more unhappy by striving to change my purpose.”

“But you do not think, you cannot think, that you can leave me in this way ? you do not believe that I can take this answer ? Grace, I have set my whole life, my whole hope of happiness, on your answer.”

She shook her head, and something of a flush came over her face as she asked :

“How many loves can a man’s life comprise ?”

“The rest of my life shall, at least, comprise but one. Grace, this is not worthy of you : past follies or weaknesses or temptations are not to be reckoned even against the best of men. I cannot believe that you are thus influenced ; there is something far deeper behind. Tell me, I beseech of you, what it is that persuades you to refuse the offer I make you of a love that is as deep as my whole heart, and shall last out my life—ay, and long, long survive it, if all be not myth and fable on which we build our hopes. Tell me, dearest, dearest Grace, what secret thought impels you to reject me.”

“Mr. Lennon, I need not tell you. Your own heart must surely tell you. Look into your heart, and ask it what your motive was in offering to marry me. O, it was a generous and a kindly motive. I well know that—I don’t mistake it. It was the wish to take a poor girl from poverty and give her a life of ease and freedom. But you don’t know women yet, Mr. Lennon—at least such women as I should wish to be——”

“I don’t understand a word of this,” he interrupted passionately. “I love you, Grace, as deeply and truly as ever man loved woman. I had no such pitiful motive in my mind. I have not any of the hyperbolical charity in me which you seem to describe. I love you ; and I did believe, or think, or hope, that you loved me. And I have nothing to offer you but my love. I am not young. I told you frankly in my letter how well I knew that we are not suited in years, or in any-

thing perhaps ; but I thought you would overlook all that—and—and love me. If I was wrong in this, why spare me the truth ? Let me know it at once. I am not idiot enough to think that a gifted and beautiful girl like you—yes, like you ; I mean no idle compliments, Heaven knows—is bound to throw herself into the arms of the first man who chooses to make love to her. Tell me the truth and the worst at once. Look me in the face, let me see your eyes, and say that you do not and cannot love me ; and I will free you that moment from any persecution of mine. I will bear my lonely life how I may, though beyond all words more lonely now than it was when first I saw you here ; and you shall be free at least from further importunity.”

“ O, Mr. Lennon, how can you ask me ? how can you thus force an answer from me ? ”

“ Yes ; I must even force it. I must know. I will not allow you to leave this place until you tell me. Grace Ethelstone, do you not love me ? ”

She drew calmly away from him, and seemed to struggle with her emotion, that she might make a deliberate decisive answer. He waited for the worst, and nerved himself to bear it. He stood firm and fixed, with lips compressed, as a brave soldier may stand to receive the volley from his old comrades, who are drawn out to give him his doom of death.

“ Mr. Lennon, I scorn to deceive you. I prefer rather, if it must be, to humiliate myself. I did love you, and I hoped to love you always.”

An exclamation of joy broke from him, and he seized her in his arms, and kissed her again and again. She hardly resisted ; and O, what a wild temptation it was to her to abandon herself wholly to his love and to her own ! But the bitter thought came over her that she would be only giving a whole heart in exchange for half a love, for the relics and embers of a heart ; and she wrapped herself in her almost fierce independence, and stood isolated again.

From a social and conventional point of view it was just as well that she did so. For she had hardly drawn herself away, when a railway porter, trying to find occupation somewhere, looked into the waiting-room, glanced all around, as if to show official keenness and attention, and then went away—rather proud of the fact that there really were passengers to be seen in the place at a dead hour of the day, when the station

was usually as much of a solitude as Robinson Crusoe's island before the pious mariner touched its shores. The traffic of this station with the busy world was only at two regular intervals, like the tides. The City men ebbed away after breakfast, and flowed back again to late dinner or early tea ; and between these tides there was only a blank.

The momentary interruption of the porter gave Grace and Lennon alike an opportunity of recovering their composure of demeanour, and a reminder that, after all, even in this station, walls might have ears, and porters had certainly eyes.

“I cannot understand you, Grace,” Lennon resumed in hesitating accents of strongly compressed emotion ; “you will not say you do not care for me—do not love me——”

“I will not say I did not love you, Mr. Lennon. It would not be true if I were to say so.”

“Then why refuse me ? why torture me and yourself by so cruel a chimera as that which you have raised ? Do you think me so ignoble as to be incapable of loving ? Do you think me so stupidly incapable of appreciating you, as to suppose that anything but love could win you ? You would not surely make us both unhappy for our lives because of a fantastic suspicion, or some perverted idea of independence ? Grace, I could not have believed that you would be unjust and cruel.”

“Mr. Lennon, you are a scholar, and a man of experience and science, and you have talents and gifts ; but there are things you don't understand. You don't understand, I think, the heart of a woman—at least, of some women. You do not know how much they ask when they give their love, and how deeply degraded they must be when they consent to accept less. I have nothing on earth to give a man—nothing that could tempt the poorest being that works for his bread—but my love and my heart ; but these I could give wholly and for ever ; and I will never, never give them where less is offered in return. I have seen little life, but yet enough to teach me what slaves, what abject and miserable slaves, women are who accept less than the one love of a whole heart, or who have not eyes to see that they are denied it. Many misfortunes may happen to me, but this one never !”

“Then,” said Lennon, “I talk in vain. I cannot hope to move you. I have no such fresh first love and pure heart to offer. I do not blame you, Grace, for setting your claims so high ; but I cannot meet them. You know more perhaps of

my life than I thought—more than it appeared to me, looking over it, I dare say, too thoughtlessly, it was of any use that you should know. Men regard these things lightly ; so do most women. I do not blame you that you do otherwise. Your standard is too high for me. I now know your meaning, Grace. You ask me in other words : Have I anything to offer worthy of your pure and perfect love ? I answer, I have not.”

“ Yet you do not understand me, Mr. Lennon ; I am not so vain and self-conceited. I know too well how little right I have to set up any such standard. I am not one of your saints—I don’t appreciate saints. I fear I could not turn away, perhaps, even from a criminal, if I loved him—and if—if I felt that he loved only me.”

“ But I love only you,” exclaimed Lennon vehemently. “ Can you not see it ? Have you no eyes to judge ? women generally don’t want that insight. Why have I followed you, and clung to you for months and months ? Have we not looked love to each other ? ”

“ We have,—it is true ; and I cannot think of it now without feeling ashamed of my own weakness. O, Mr. Lennon, have even *you* no sense of the cruel contempt of the love of men to women ? Am I the only one to whom you have protested such things ? Have I had no predecessors ? And who is to tell me that I should have no rivals ? What happiness, what blessing could come of such a marriage ? ”

“ Some one,” he said sternly, “ has been poisoning your mind against me.”

“ No, no—I declare to you no. I know no one who is not your friend—no one who would not bitterly blame me for what I am doing now.”

“ Yet you *have* heard something of me which has decided you. O, yes ; there are such things to be told : and one’s friends can tell them. They can always fill up the blanks which our own tenderness to ourselves does not think it quite necessary to supply. I dare say all you have heard is true. My life was not—what it ought to have been. I do penance for it—now, at this moment, more, far more, than ever before. Let it be so—I have no more to say.”

Grace’s tears were bursting from her eyes. “ O, Mr. Lennon,” she exclaimed, “ how harsh and cruel you must think me ; but think, too, how much I suffer ! I know—my heart

and conscience tell me—that we ought not to marry ; that I could not believe in the endurance of your love ; that you would soon begin to tire of me—no, no, don't tell me anything else, please ; you believe it now, but a short time would bring change. Ah ! you, Mr. Lennon, you men are not like us : love is only a plaything with you—a thing to be fondled in the intervals of ambition and business and pleasure, like an infant. Such love some women can accept, and can be happy with it and make their husbands happy : I could not. I could not warm myself on the ashes of a heart. Let us leave each other while there is time, before we come to scorn and hate each other—and I should scorn and hate any one who gave me but half a love, or the intervals of a love, and myself for having consented to accept such a fate.”

Yet was there not a yielding softness in her voice ? Did not the tears that relieved her heart speak promise to her lover ? Yes, doubtless. Had Lennon, then, once more caught her in his arms, and passionately renewed the pledge of his undying love, she might have relented and gone his way, and run her risk, and surely not repented ; but Lennon's sensitive and proud nature—proud even in the uncompromising recognition of his own defects—was deeply pierced by her words. He saw in her a pure, unworldly, high-minded girl, with a heart that the flesh and the devil had never tainted ; and he looked back upon his own stormy youth and feverish years of folly and heedlessness and ingratitude, and his manhood of futile penitence ; and he said to his soul that it would be a shame and sin to mingle two such natures. “There is no recalling the past,” he bitterly thought ; “and you cannot mingle the pure and the impure if the first be true to itself. I accept my sentence.”

So he bowed his head to that which now seemed Heaven's judgment, and pleaded no more against it.

“You are right, Grace,” he said, with forced calmness, “and I accept your decision ; indeed, it was not without some misgiving and doubt that I ever ventured on thinking one so pure and noble-minded as you could be induced to mingle her life with the wreck and remnant of a life like mine. I cannot blame you—although your words take away from me any last poor chance of happiness. Good-bye. I met you here for the first time ; it seems only right that I should take leave of you here for ever.”

"Then we must not meet any more, ever again?" she asked in accents broken by emotion,

"No more, no more—unless——"

She shook her head sadly, and crushed with a decided expression any faint hope that might for the moment have revived within him. She was broken-hearted, but her resolution was firmly set. Poor Mabel's confidences, the cruel kindness of her arguments to show the need of some good woman taking Ralph Lennon's life in hand, had been decisive.

"Some day, Mr. Lennon," she said, with a wan and feeble effort at a smile, "you will be glad of this, and will thank me in your heart that I saved you from the result of a sudden and generous impulse. And I—if I am never glad, yet I shall still think I have not done wrong; and as you said yourself the other day, when you quoted to me from one of your classical poets, I will order my heart to bear it."

"Life," he replied, "to you is long and full of hope, the sun is not behind you; you will be happy and forget all this. You consult your own happiness, and you are right."

"O, Mr. Lennon, how can you be so cruel! Consult my own happiness, and forget! I have trodden my own happiness under foot—and *we* are not like men, we do not forget—when everything else in life is forgotten, a woman remembers her love."

"When everything else in life is forgotten," he added in bitter tones, "the sins of a man are remembered to him."

"Are we parting then in this way—in bitterness?"

"No, not in bitterness, Grace; but I am not so good a Christian as to be able to reconcile myself to this at once."

"One word," she suddenly interposed, "one request. I do ask you, Mr. Lennon, to promise me that you will tell no one of what I have said to-day; I have a reason for it, which you may guess. You have generously spared me reproaches from your own lips; spare me also the reproaches and remonstrances of others."

"I understand you; and you may rely on my silence, even if I had a motive to speak, which surely I have not."

She moved towards that door of the waiting-room which opened on the side of the station beyond which lay the road she had to walk homeward. At the door she turned, and held out her hand:

"Let us part with words of friendship," she said tremblingly.

But he pressed his lips to her forehead and then to her lips. "I leave you," he murmured, "with no poor words of pretended friendship. I love you, Grace, and shall love you always ; and it shall be at once my joy and my punishment to think that you might have loved me."

And then she left the station and walked alone her road, and never looked back ; but agony rang a knell in her ears and in her soul like the chorus in *Faust* : "O woe ! O woe ! the beautiful world—thou hast destroyed it." She felt like one on whom the bitterness of death has fallen, and who knows of no heaven to follow.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANOTHER APPEAL.

OF all men living, of all persons living, Grace Ethelstone would have wished that day to avoid Walter Warton. She had a terror present to her mind all through her interview with Ralph—the terror of Warton's making his appearance at the railway-station and seeing her. She knew he would not stay long at home ; and she hoped by walking back through all manner of circuitous and obscure ways she might avoid him, and not reach the house till after he had gone ; but she was not so fortunate. Just as she came in sight of the house she saw him standing at the little gate ; in fact, he was waiting for her. He had told Mabel that he must speak to Grace, and bade his wife keep in the house. There was no turning back now ; and Grace was too proud to show any emotion of any kind under such eyes, if she could possibly help it—indeed, her fear of meeting him was chiefly a fear of herself, and a doubt of her own strength to hide her feelings.

"You are out early, Grace," Warton said.

"Yes, Walter. I often go out early."

"And alone ?"

"Yes. I like to be alone."

Warton only smiled at this rather marked intimation.

"Solitude is the nurse of genius, Grace—so some great person says : Gibbon, I think—but I fear it is only in our younger and more romantic days we quite appreciate the

sentiment. Will you let me break in on your solitude for a moment or two? I want to talk to you, my dear; and I don't see you very often. Shall we walk this way?"

"Any way you please, Walter."

"In this direction, then; for it will bring me a little nearer to the station."

They walked in silence until they had passed some of the houses: then they turned into a quiet lane. Grace endeavoured to seem quite easy and unconcerned, and, to keep up appearances, stopped now and then and plucked a wild-flower. An unlucky device too; for one which she plucked proved to be of a kind Ralph Lennon was very fond of, and its fragrance brought to her heart a sudden rush of sweet and bitter memories; and Walter, looking suddenly round, and about to open his explanations, saw that tears had started into her eyes.

"I am afraid, Grace, that Mabel has been foolishly saying something which pained you? I am very sorry; but she meant it well, poor Mabel."

"Mabel has been saying nothing, Walter, but what you told her to say, I suppose."

"What has she been saying?"

Grace made no reply.

"Speak, dear, and don't be childish. What has she been saying?"

"I can't go over it all again, and I don't mean to. It is cruel of you, Walter, to ask me. *You* know what she said."

"Well, I suppose, in plain words, she urged you to marry Ralph Lennon?"

"She did. At least she was the interpreter of the message, or the command, or whatever it was. She urged me to lie in wait for Mr. Lennon, to plot for him, to insist on marrying him,—because he has money."

"Was that all?"

"What more would you have? It was not like Mabel to speak so. It was not she, indeed, who spoke. The advice was yours, Walter."

"It was, Grace. It was mine; and I now repeat it. I only wish I had spoken to you myself in the first instance, and not left it to poor Mabel to bungle and misinterpret. The advice was given, Grace, solely for your good. If you were my

daughter—indeed I can hardly think of you but as a daughter—my advice would be the same. You have too much intellect and spirit and sense to be doomed to a poor and drudging life. You were made for something much better. You have wasted enough of your time on us: waste no more. It would be in vain. Think of yourself. You cannot help *us*. I tell you frankly, girl, we are ruined!—I am lost. It will deeply embitter my failure and my trouble if you, so unlike other women, so highly deserving of something better, should be dragged down too.”

There was so much sincerity about his manner and his tone, that Grace felt involuntarily touched by it, and glanced at him with something of pity and respect. He saw the glance, and understood it. He knew that his way of putting the case was telling on her.

“That is all, Grace my dear. That is my earnest advice. *We* are lost. Mabel goes down with me; but there is a way of escape open for you, which you may accept with honour. Marry Ralph Lennon. Don’t think I would advise you to marry a man merely because he has money. But Lennon is a man of brains, and of heart too; and a woman may well be happy with him. *You*, I know, have ambition; and you are too sensible a girl to believe in romantic poverty. Trust one who has experienced it, dear. There is no happiness where there is poverty.”

“O, Walter, for shame! I don’t believe a word of it.”

“Don’t you? Look at our home. You know all its miserable struggles and shifts and meannesses, cramping the soul and wearing out the brain. Do you tell me there could be happiness in such a place?”

“Yes, Walter, I do. I do indeed—with—with——”

“With what, girl?”

“Well, Walter, with love, of course.”

He smiled pityingly.

“I don’t mean to answer you, Grace, with the usual sarcasms or the usual commonplaces about love escaping by the window when poverty comes in at the door. But look calmly at it. When a man’s first concern in the morning must be how to meet the money-demands of the day, can he find a place in his thoughts for love? When he lies awake at night racking his brain to discover some way of meeting an overdue and inexorable bill, do you think he can extract comfort from the

kisses of his wife? When she has to face the tax-gatherer, and talk him into waiting yet a little longer; when the butcher declines to send any more, and the baker threatens with the County Court; and the housemaid grows impertinent, because of her unpaid wages and her mistress's too obvious poverty,—do you think the wife is quite in a condition to enjoy a sentimental walk in the moonlight, and to gaze fondly into her bankrupt husband's eyes? Grace, these little mean miseries kill love. It dies under them like some fine animal pricked to death by tiny poisoned darts. You don't understand even the weakness of women. There are scores of women who could plunge into fire with a man, and die there clasping him to the last, but whose love would not endure two years of mean, unheroic, ignoble poverty. I don't blame them—I quite understand it."

"I don't, Walter; and I don't want to. I don't believe any woman worth the name has that abject and craven dread of poverty. I should be ashamed of them, and hate them all, and myself too, if I thought of them as you do. No; don't argue it with me, Walter. I can't argue, but I don't want to be convinced by you; and you could not convince me. Life is not all so mean as you think it."

"The time will come when you will acknowledge that the petty evils of poverty are more demoralizing than the heavy strokes of fate."

"Well, Walter" (she was rather weary of the barren discussion), "it does not personally concern me much to confute your dreadful heresy. There is no poor and bankrupt lover suing to me, and no rich lover either. I hope I have hands and brains to make myself a living somehow, and I am not at all afraid of being poor. I know so little of any other condition, that I suffer no privation."

"But you need not be poor. You can marry Ralph Lennon."

She was on the point of an outburst of anger. There was something revolting to her in this way of treating the subject. But she controlled herself, and endeavoured to answer in a light and careless tone:

"Would you give Mr. Lennon himself no choice or voice in the matter? Would you recommend me to make the proposal?"

Walter thoroughly misunderstood her this time. He really

believed that she was looking at the matter coolly and sensibly, according to his way of thinking, and that she only wanted a fair and creditable opportunity of falling in with his views. He was very much pleased. This comes, he thought, of talking to a girl as if she was a rational human being—not going on in Mabel's nonsensical way.

"No, my dear, I don't recommend you to do exactly that : but you can easily give Lennon a little more encouragement. He always was a shy reserved sort of fellow ; but he is kind-hearted and generous, and easily won. Grace, I have so high a regard for him that I speak, indeed, as much for him as for you. In making yourself happy, you may be the means of saving him."

"Then this," said she, at last breaking from all restraint, "is the high task you intend for me ! You ask me to throw myself in Mr. Lennon's way, at his feet, perhaps, and cajole him into marrying me ; and you encourage me to this by telling me that I can only save him from other women by marrying him myself ? I would not have such a social creed, such ideas of women, for all the world ! Walter, you mean to do me good, no doubt, but you have taken a wrong way to do it. I would marry a man were he poor as a beggar if I loved him, and if he loved me, and me alone ; but I hope I shall never be mean and base enough to throw myself at the feet of anyone who is capable of being the slave of the first woman that crosses his path."

"But, my dear child, you greatly exaggerate—"

"No, no—I don't exaggerate. I understand only too well what you mean, and what Mabel meant. She told it to me plainly enough."

"Grace, if you suppose there is anything in Ralph Lennon which makes him unworthy of a good wife, I tell you most earnestly, my dear, that you misunderstand him and do him a great wrong—and a great wrong as well to Mabel and to me. As truly as a man can speak, I do assure you that I never knew anyone with a higher and more generous nature than Ralph Lennon. Let me do him that justice—it is only bare justice. He and I were once warm and close friends ; and though of late we have been somewhat estranged—I don't very well know why—I must say that I have seen no change in the truth and manliness of his nature. I wish I were like him ! Ah, no, Grace ; you may not love him, perhaps—I speak out

plainly ; you are no silly schoolgirl—but you must esteem him.”

Something of a crimson glow that flashed across Grace's cheek—something that sparkled in her eyes—something in the instant dropping of her eyelids and catching of her breath—as she heard the words, “You may not love him,” smote upon Warton's attention, and brought upon him in a moment a conviction he had not expected. He could not mistake it. The sincerity and transparency of Grace's nature betrayed her secret.

He laid his hand gently, almost tenderly, upon hers. He was really touched, and for the moment actually forgot his own speculations and aims. “Poor girl !” so ran for an instant the silent current of his thoughts, “she really loves him. I never counted upon this. I do wish he loved her—I hope he does. If he does, then there is no difficulty in making her happy, at least ; and even if he does not, he is a generous sort of fellow, who can easily be induced to marry her out of good-nature, and he cannot but come to be fond of her in the end.”

There was a throb of something like sincere and disinterested pleasure in his heart at the thought that he might perhaps be able to bring about a consummation which would secure at least one poor girl's happiness. He thought he now quite understood Grace's warmth of protestation against Mabel's well-meant advice. “She loves him ; and Mabel's talk has only made her think he cares nothing about her, or perhaps is not capable of really caring about anyone. Quite natural that a spirited girl should feel disappointed and angry, and should chafe at the idea of throwing herself at a man's feet when he ought to be at hers. What an idiot Mabel is ; and how little she understands of the nature of any human being ! Well, well, I think this can be all put right ; and I shall lose no time in bringing about the result which will suit us all.”

He had come to a stop when the expression of her face made such an impression on him. They were still standing, and he kept his hand laid gently upon hers. She did not speak. At last he broke the silence :

“Let us say no more of this just now, dear child. I am very glad I spoke to you about it ; but I don't want to trouble you by any further talk over it. Be sure, Grace, I understand your feelings, and appreciate them. I desire your happiness, but surely not at the expense of your better nature. Grace, I understand you at last. Do you understand me ?”

"I think not, Walter."

"Not !"

"I think not. Forgive me if I speak too plainly."

"Speak more plainly still, dear. Why do you think you do not understand me ?"

"Because I sometimes think you are sincere and disinterested—and sometimes I do not."

"Just now, which opinion do you lean to ?"

"I hope what you say is well-meant and sincere ; but I cannot keep myself from thinking that behind it there is something I am not allowed to see."

"Your old prejudices, Grace. You never—at least, never of late—have given me any confidence, or shown me any warmth. You think I neglect Mabel—is not that the first cause of your want of confidence ?"

"It is. I am angry about Mabel, and grieved for her. But what we are speaking of now is not that. Last night you sent Mabel to me, and set her a part to play—only she said more, perhaps, than you intended. You were making an instrument of her, Walter, for some purpose of your own. Are you not also making an instrument of me ?"

"No, Grace ; no, by Heaven !—not now !"

"Not now ?"

"Not now. I declare it on my honour, on my soul, if you need such a protestation. At any time my motive—my principal motive, dear ; nobody in this life is influenced by one sole motive—was only one that every prudent father or guardian allows to influence him, and is respected by all the world for. I was anxious to secure you a promising and prosperous settlement in life—to save you, dear, from our wreck. A worldly motive, doubtless ; but I am a man of the world. *Now* I have another and a deeper motive—to secure your happiness."

He spoke these last few words so slowly and with so marked an emphasis, that she could not mistake his meaning, and she reddened under his gaze. But she plucked up courage, looked him full in the face, and replied :

"Walter, I am glad to believe that this is all you had in your thoughts. I am glad to believe it—and I do believe it. But I beg and pray of you, if you really desire my happiness, to put such thoughts wholly away. Never, O, I beseech of you, never try to make me happy—in that way. Indeed, indeed, it cannot be. Don't ask me for any explanations. You would

perhaps think me foolish and romantic and nonsensical ; but I cannot make my nature anything that it is not—and"—she began to fear she was becoming too serious and earnest—"and I don't want to marry any one just yet. I prefer my independence, Walter—my crust of bread and liberty, like the country mouse ; and please, Walter, we will not talk of this any more, and you will promise me not to think of it any more."

He was anxious himself now to dismiss the subject, for he began to think he saw his way. That all her scruples and doubts and love of independence could be easily conquered he felt convinced ; indeed, they hardly seemed worth thinking about. He felt no doubt that he could bring that little story interjected into the volume of his life to a fit and happy conclusion ; and he did not care to bind himself by any promises which might in the least interfere with his purpose. So he waved the whole question away with an easy gesture, and said :

"Well, Grace, you are a girl of sense ; and your wishes shall, of course, be law to me. Let us say no more of this. I am glad we have spoken so frankly together ; and I think you now, perhaps, understand me better than you did."

"Yes, Walter, I think so too."

"Then good-bye, dear—I am going this way ; I return to town at once."

"Poor Mabel !" sighed Grace involuntarily.

"Poor Mabel !" echoed Warton ; "who would not pity her, Grace ? Do you wonder that I long to help to make some one happy—I, whose evil fate it has been to make *her* so unhappy ? Do you wonder that life as I look at her is an agony to me ? Do you wonder that I avoid her and fly from her ? Do you wonder that, looking into the future, and seeing all dark for her and for my children, and for all who hold by me, I long, as compensation to earth, as atonement to Heaven, for the evil I have done, to help in throwing some light of happiness over *your* path ? Think of this, Grace, and perhaps you will understand me better, and judge less hardly of me."

Without further farewell he left her, and went quietly on his way to the station. He did not once look back, and he presently disappeared round a corner of the road.

Grace looked after him for a while without moving. She leaned against the grass-grown wall which bordered the little road, and felt very weary and sad. She had walked a great

deal and had been a long time standing, and mere physical exhaustion came to the aid of mental excitement and suffering to enfeeble and depress her. Yet with all her own special disappointments and trials, her mind rested with some anxiety and some wonder on what she had heard from Warton, and what she had seen in his face. She began to doubt whether she had not misunderstood him and wronged him all through—whether he was so utterly selfish and egotistical as she had long believed him to be. “I think something might, perhaps, have been made of him,” she thought; and then, acknowledging the reluctance she herself felt to endure just now the companionship of Mabel, recognising the impossibility of finding intelligent and responsive sympathy there, she could hardly wonder that Warton loved his home so little, and sought companionship elsewhere. Her own acute distress made her sympathetic and tolerant; and she recalled with pain the kindly words—were they even but words—which Warton had spoken of her and the haggard look upon his face, and the dark eyes that burned with so ominous a light of anxiety and even despair. When his hand touched hers she felt that it was cold and damp and tremulous; and his whole frame looked weak and wasted, as it had never seemed before.

“How unhappy and miserable we are, all of us!” thought the poor girl; and then the full sense of her own misery rushed back upon her, and she remembered, too, how unhappy Len-non had seemed to be; and her heart sickened and sank within her, and she began to doubt whether her high resolve, which looked so just and so inevitable in the morning, was not, after all, a cruel and fatal delusion. Yet again, her pride, her hope, her romance perhaps, came to her aid, and forbade her to condemn herself because she had not been content to accept what she termed in her bitterness the ashes of a heart. I am afraid she was very unjust and hard in her reflections upon poor Mabel. “Why did she tell me such things?” murmured the wretched girl, sobbing and moaning now at last in grief that could no longer be controlled. “Why did she tell me anything about him? Could she not have left me to myself, to my own counsel? I should have been happy if I had heard nothing. I should never have known that he was not all my ideal—and so he would have been perhaps in the end. And now it is too late, too late, and all is over; and I have to go back to my miserable and lonely life, and he will forget me.”

When she had relieved her feelings for a moment by this burst of tears—in which she had revelled while the lane was lonely, and she could lean unheeded on the green bank and cover her face with her hands, unwatched by prying eyes—she raised her head and looked vaguely, sadly, along the far horizon, now cleared by recent showers. In grief of any kind it seems the most natural impulse to turn the eyes to the line where sky and earth touch, and to think of some place beyond, and long to go there. “Over all the hill-tops,” says the poet, “is rest”—at least wherever there are hill-tops and sad hearts it is sure that melancholy eyes look to the distant range, and send longing hopes to some vague, imagined place of peace beyond them. The sky-line of Grace’s landscape rested on no noble peaks, or swelling, motionless billows of hills, but only on the gentle undulations of a soft and sloping country. But still there was a horizon, suggesting a place beyond; and the farthest trees that could be seen had their boughs bent backward, and thus told of the breeze habitually blowing in from the not far distant sea; and the heart of the poor girl yearned for the place beyond—any place beyond—that horizon; and she said to herself, “I will go away, I will go away;” and, somewhat strengthened in spirit, she left the lonely little road and returned to the home which to her was yet more lonely.

It was a trial to bear with Mabel that long day and evening; for Mabel’s heart was like some peaceful and dull little church in a country village, which only rings its joy-bells or tolls its passing knell for things that concern the lord and master of the neighbourhood. She thought Walter was looking very weak and anxious, and she asked Grace perpetual questions about his appearance when he left her; and she told Grace she had found out by chance that lately dear Walter had become liable to such queer fainting-fits; “and, my dear, there must be something dreadful in that; to see a man faint must be worse than even to see a man crying, and that I think is terrible!” And she wondered whether he would be sure to get his dinner; and, poor thing, she fretted and worried herself so much that at last she got fairly tired out, and went to bed very early, and Grace was again alone. And then she threw herself eagerly, miserably back upon her own grief, even as a young bereaved mother steals away from those who would vainly console, to gaze once more on the little bed where her firstborn lies dead.

Meanwhile, Walter Warton went his way back to London. He felt in somewhat better heart than of late, for he thought that it lay quite easily within his power to bring about a marriage between Ralph and Grace ; and this he had little doubt might be the means of serving his own purposes materially. But he was sincerely anxious to do Grace a service. He had always felt a little afraid of her, because he feared that she saw through him ; and he longed to conciliate her, to stand well in her eyes, to win her gratitude and affection. He longed, too, for his own special reasons, that Lennon should be married, and thus removed out of his way ; and in fact all things began to look rather hopeful, and Warton thought he saw the clouds breaking that lately seemed to close in hopelessly upon him. He got into the train almost elate, and for the time forgot the sick sensations, the weakness, the dizziness, the queer heart-pains he had been tormented so much by during recent months ; and as he got out on the London platform he acknowledged to himself that he had not for a twelvemonth entered the metropolis with so hopeful a breast.

Unfortunately for his plans, he had not been long in London when an event which he might have foreseen, and indeed ought to have expected, interposed suddenly and awkwardly between him and his purposes. The very next day he was a dismal, dejected captive in the hands of his most dreaded enemies.

CHAPTER XXIV

FLOOD AND FEVER.

WHEN Lennon reached his hotel in the Strand, late on the day of his parting from Grace, he found a telegram from Tom Berry awaiting him. It was laconic. "Floods here : awful destruction. No harm to us yet."

Lennon was a kind-hearted man ; but the sense of relief which the excitement gave him did assuredly overcome his sympathy with the sufferers by the floods. At that moment he would have welcomed with fierce satisfaction the announcement of another general deluge. He was weary of the sun.

There was a night-train for the North which would carry him to Kendal or Windermere. He drank a whole bottle of

champagne in some fierce draughts, and the wine neither flushed his cheeks nor soothed his heart. He drove to the train, and was three-quarters of an hour too soon. He chafed and raged up and down the dismal waiting-room until people began to crowd in there ; and then he walked out and went to the further end of the platform, where there was nobody. At last the time to start came ; and as the train darted through the first tunnel he longed for a collision. Burning down a house to roast one's own eggs illustrates the practice of selfish men ; but unselfish men would sometimes welcome the thunder of a battle, or the crash of an earthquake, to drown their own grief.

All night through he went over and over his interview with Grace. He thought of new and powerful appeals which must have moved her ; he studied with vain memory every look and word of hers, torturing himself with the thought that here perhaps—there perhaps—was hope, if he had but caught it in time. He answered her objections ; he swore away her doubts ; he appealed to her love, and even to her pity. He wondered at himself for his dulness, his want of perseverance, his impatience, his petulant pride. He was sorry he had left London so soon ; that he did not go back and see her again, and, if needs were, tear her from her foolish doubts and fears. Then he told himself that after all she loved him, and he bade his heart take hope ; and then again he said that no woman who really loved a man ever met his love with such scruples and such repulsion, and he gave himself to despair. Nor did he fail to ask himself who had filled Grace's heart with doubt of him. Warton ? Had he not always suspected Warton of having blackened him to Mabel Ethelstone—when she was Mabel Ethelstone—years ago ? Did they not quarrel about it ? But Warton always denied it. In this instance, what motive could Warton have ? Grace's own lips told him as plainly as words could speak that her people would have wished her to marry him ; and indeed his own eyes and ears and observation had long ago made this plain to him. There surely was no reason for suspecting Warton. And yet of late Lennon never came near Warton without being pervaded by a subtle indefinable distrust, a sense of the presence of something like deceit and treachery. As he thought of this—thought of it one moment only to put it away the next, ashamed of giving it an instant's harbour—fierce vague vows of revenge came bubbling to his

lips, and he sometimes started in fear lest some sound of menace had escaped his tongue and surprised his fellow-passengers. "Revenge!" he said to himself bitterly. "What chance has a man of punishing his most treacherous enemy now? Duelling is out of fashion—as much out of fashion with the new polite world as I am myself." And he thought of the pistols which hung up at home, the old Australian pistols which had been his faithful friends many times in the rough early Ballarat days; and he felt that it would be a joy to put one of these into the hand of his enemy, and take the other himself, and let God or the devil show the right. And again he scorned himself for the meanness of supposing that he had any such treacherous enemy, and that poor Mabel's husband, his own early friend, Walter Warton, who had often all but urged him to marry Grace Ethelstone, could be that enemy.

So the short summer night dragged through, in a constant deluge of rain brightened by frequent lightning. It was clear day when he began to approach the lake country; and people who got in at the stations were beginning to talk of the dreadful succession of rainy weeks, and of the great floods in parts of Cumberland and Westmoreland and Lancashire. Ralph only slept a little by fits and starts, and when day came on was conscious that he looked like some haggard and wild night-bird dragged into the sun, and indeed was as careless about the matter as he was conscious of it. But he was glad when the railway journey was over, and he was near the place where there was some work to do, some excitement to be found.

For years and years there had been no such spring and summer in England. Rain, rain, incessant rain and storm, had sponged the beauty out of the landscape and the nourishment out of the corn. "The fruits of the earth were stinted;" and when rarely sun and warmth came on they were followed close by thunder, and then rain again. It was bad everywhere, and people complained and wondered and suffered from the Cheviot Hills to Southampton Water. But it was worst of all in the northern counties, and worst of all these in the lake and mountain land. We have already spoken of the deluging rain which came down during the last days of Warton's stay in Waterdale; and these days of rain it was which literally caused the cup to overflow in that region. The lake, the river, the mountain streams all overflowed, and the

tide poured seaward. The little town was for the most part a low-lying cluster of houses, bedded between lake and sea, and over it the waters literally rushed. The houses of the better class stood on higher ground here and there, and these were spared. Even an inundation commonly respects the classes whom it is proper to consider respectable. The lanes—one could hardly call them streets—of poor small houses were flooded almost to the garrets, when they rose high enough to have garrets. Small hovels were in many instances swept clean away. In the first alarm and confusion some poor creatures were drowned. Then, in wild affright, half-naked families deserted their flooded homesteads, and made for the high ground and the hills. Then the more sensible people, and those whose intelligence had not been paralysed by the sudden wash of a sort of sea sweeping through their bedrooms at stark midnight, began to take order with affairs, and to concert measures for sheltering the houseless, and clothing those whom the calamity had left bare.

Among those who never lost their presence of mind from the very first were Dr. Alwyn and his wife. Alwyn made as many expeditions up and down the town in a boat as a Venetian gondolier in carnival-time, and his wife was everywhere lending a helpful hand. And they found in none of the local people anything like the energy, composure, shiftiness, and general usefulness which were brought into play at half a moment's notice by stout Tom Berry.

More than that, Tom Berry was for the time master of the situation. For the deluge which swept over the town rushed away from the higher ground on the other side of the lake, where the Phalanstery stood; and the flood, which now ran a tearing river down the mountain pass, swept by the Phalanstery, and plunged on to swell the lake; and the Phalanstery stood high and dry. So Tom Berry at once took on himself to offer the unoccupied houses—they were now nearly all unoccupied—as a shelter to as many of the houseless as the roofs could cover.

He did not wait for authority from Lennon.

"What's the good of wasting time, ma'am?" he put the case to Myra. "Don't we know it's the very thing Mr. Lennon would do? He wouldn't like, bless you, if he thought we lost any time through doubting of him. I know him. I under-

stand him. When you understand a man in one thing you understand him in everything."

"I understand him too," said Myra rather sadly.

"Do you, ma'am? Well, I don't know. There's not many that quite understand Mr. Lennon, but *I* do; and if you do too, why, hadn't we better go to work and lose no more time about it?"

So they went to work and lost no more time. Many families had actually to be brought down, shivering and half naked, from a gusty and cheerless shelter in the hills; and many were brought in boats and rafts across the lake; and all were established as comfortably as the condition of things would allow in Lennon's little village. Great fires blazed on every hearth, and provisions of all kinds were poured in by all the townspeople who could afford to help. The gentry of the place, living here and there at little distances, soon came to know of what had happened, and were quickly on the spot with contributions of money and clothes and food, and offers of personal service. The flood had risen to its height, had done its worst; composure had returned to people's minds; and local organisation, extemporised chiefly under the guidance of Dr. Alwyn, was doing its best, when Lennon arrived upon the scene.

Of course he threw himself heart and soul into the efforts that were being made. But he declined to take the command of the Phalanstery arrangements out of Tom Berry's hands.

"Tom, you villain," he said, cheerily, "I envy you; but you have won the right to command here. You had the good fortune to be the first who found out how to make use of our Folly."

"I should be a very stupid duffer," grumbled Tom, "if I didn't see that there were people wanting houses, and houses wanting people, and that the two lots ought to be brought together. Why, even a prime minister or a duke could almost have found that out." The theory that all ministers of the Crown were sticks, and all dukes imbeciles, was an article of faith with Tom, as sacred as any of the points of the loved and lost Charter.

In Lennon's heart there was a sort of pride that at last his poor effort of speculative benevolence had come to something. It was no longer a thing to laugh at; it was the first raft

available when all else was going to pieces ; it was the centre now of the relief organization which the floods had made an inevitable necessity. Till late that night he went about from house to house of it, to see what could yet be done to add to the comfort of the inmates. Dr. Alwyn was with him. When they came out at last into the open air, Lennon stood for a moment and looked along the white rows of gleaming cottages, on which the moonlight now fell. An expression of something like gratification must have marked itself on his face ; for Dr. Alwyn, having silently observed him for a moment, said with a smile,

“ I know what you are thinking of, Lennon. Confess you are thinking about the stone which the builders rejected, and which yet became the corner-stone of the building—eh ? ”

“ Perhaps I was—at least, of something to that effect. Sincerely, Dr. Alwyn, I am glad to be of some use to anybody or anything.”

“ Come, now, you speak in a desponding and Byronic sort of tone, as if you had never personally done any good for human creature before, and as if no mortal being cared about you. Why, man, you mustn't think that of us ! We have our slow ways and our prejudices here, and we get dreadfully frightened if any one talks of the Mosaic account of creation ; we think that smacks of science and infidelity. But you must not suppose we don't understand you and appreciate you. Just try us. Stand for the county—and I can't promise you that you'll get in ; in fact, I know you wouldn't ; but see if we here in this place don't all poll for you to a man. I would not answer for the women, if Mill's principles were in force. The petticoat has always been a banner of high orthodoxy ; but for *us*, we would rally round you—isn't that the proper phrase ? ”

Dr. Alwyn spoke in a jesting tone ; but he wished his words to have their earnest meaning too.

“ I never doubted *your* good feeling,” said Lennon ; “ but I think somehow this place and I don't quite agree. I have been thinking of striking my tent, Dr. Alwyn, and seeking a camping-ground somewhere else.”

“ I am sorry to hear it, but not surprised. I never expected you to vegetate here always. We shall miss you here, all of us ”—and here Alwyn's voice slightly failed him ; for he could not help remembering how little he had seen of his friend lately, and why—“ but we have no right to think of you set-

ting down in such a place, and throwing away your years and your brains among us humdrum folks. You ought to go to London, and plunge actively into political life. You would soon make a way and a name."

"In politics? A Radical and Red Republican, and what not, such as I am?"

"Pooh, nonsense! you are only a Radical and Red Republican as I was once a votary of Shelley's *Queen Mab* and Volney's *Ruins of Empires*—just because I had nothing to go actively to work at. Find a path, Lennon, and tread it, and don't vex your brain with fantastic theories of any kind. If you want to reach any goal, you must look at the way before you, and not send your eyes wandering among the stars. Go to London, and go straight into practical politics; take up the management of our colonies, or the workhouse-hospital system, or the education question, or Irish land-tenure, or the regeneration of Poland, if you like; and see if you don't soon fall into working habits, and leave dreams and nonsense behind. I like you, Lennon, in good faith, and I think too highly of you not to be sorry to see you running to seed here. *I bone, quo virtus tua te vocat, i pede fausto.*"

"I have not thought of settling in London," said Lennon slowly; "I have thought rather of going to America—going out west, perhaps."

"Into the forest primeval? Don't do anything of the kind; it will be another failure, if you count your life here a failure. Give yourself up to human interest and the society of your kind. Live and work with educated human beings like yourself. Get married, and be happy."

Lennon shook his head. "I'm not what people call a marrying man."

"Why not? You seem to be just the sort of man to be very happy in married life. Take my advice, Lennon. It is not good for a man to live alone."

"Very like; but man has to do things now and then that his physicians of soul or body don't prescribe as good for him."

"But there is no need for you to live alone."

"Well, I suppose I must only fall back on Sam Slick's excuse for celibacy. Those I would have wouldn't have me, and those who would have me the devil wouldn't have."

"Come, that won't do. I believe I, even I, could name one

who would suit you exactly, and who, I think, would not be so hard as to refuse."

"No, you couldn't," replied Lennon, cutting the sentence short, "and it's useless trying. Good-night, Dr. Alwyn. One thing you may rely upon—before I make up my mind finally to emigrate anywhere, I'll come and talk to you about it."

So they parted for that night. Dr. Alwyn went home, and began to talk to his wife about Lennon's determination to leave the place, and his apparent unhappiness. Myra was silent and restless, and evidently uncomfortable, and her eyes never met her husband's.

"She doesn't like him," thought Dr. Alwyn; "but I wonder she does not show more interest in the matter, when she knows how highly I think of him."

And he sighed and thought that even the best of women are a little unreasonable in their ways, and that a man must not hope to argue them out of their likings or dislikings.

The course of events naturally threw Mrs. Alwyn and Lennon frequently together during the few days of excitement. But they were only thrown together. They spoke to each other merely as ordinary acquaintances might. Her manner, indeed, was constrained and distant. His was just what it usually was to her. Indeed, he was hardly thinking of her at all. When he did think directly of her, it was only to wonder how so energetic, zealous, and brave a woman could be so cold and formal.

One incident must be mentioned before the floods are seen to subside. Captain Eastham came over at an early stage of the business to lend a helping hand, and made himself very active everywhere. Speaking one day to Lennon, he suddenly said:

"By the bye, have you heard from Warton lately?"

"No; not for weeks back."

"Then you don't know of his present fix?"

"Not at all. What is the matter?"

"Well, I suppose it's no secret; in fact it can't be, for lots of fellows know all about it. He's in the hands of the Philistines—Whitecross-street business. I'm very sorry for it; and he feels it sensitively—too sensitively by far. Some fellows don't mind it."

"I am very sorry indeed to hear it. Does his wife know?"

" Luckily not ; and Warton is, above all things, anxious that she shouldn't. Of course, Lennon, I need not pledge you to secrecy. All things considered, it is now to Warton's advantage that he never was much of a family man, and his being away from home a few days more or less won't create any special wonder. I don't know Mrs. Warton myself, but I believe she is a very nice, good woman ; and somehow I don't think Warton is the sort of man who ever ought to have married. It requires a genius for marriage to be able to make anything of it. I haven't the gift myself—and I doubt whether *he* has. If I were inclined to marry I think I should like to marry Warton's niece. I don't know whether you noticed her at all when she was staying with the Alwyns—you don't profess to be much of a ladies' man, I believe ; but she is a really fine girl, with plenty of talent and spirit, and not a bit of nonsense about her. I quite liked her ; and I am doubly sorry for this business of poor Warton's."

" But can nothing be done ? "

" Don't know, I am sure. As far as I am concerned, nothing. I am quite hard up myself, and so are most of the fellows I know. I fear my security wouldn't do much for Warton just now. As for the chiefs and the Carlton and that, I don't believe they would advance a sixpence to Warton. Between ourselves, some of the chiefs don't believe in him, don't like him—they say he has lost any popularity he ever had, and that he would do us more harm than good."

" Are his debts very heavy ? "

" O no ; not what you or I or most people would call heavy. I wish I could compound with my hereditary enemies for three times the amount."

" What is his figure ? "

" Well, I don't of course know his full liabilities. I suppose nobody ever made full confession to his friends on that subject. But I know that a thousand, or twelve hundred at most, would release him from the bonds of captivity just now, and give him a chance of another run."

" Is that all ? " Lennon had formed an idea of a vast heap of debt crushing Warton down—something hopeless to struggle against. His own treasure from the underworld—a very little treasure at the best when compared with what Waterdale rumour had given it out to be—had been diminishing rather rapidly of late. But a thousand or twelve hundred pounds

would not much affect it either way ; and he was not going to let poor Mabel Warton's husband remain in the hands of the Philistines for that much.

"I think I can settle this matter, Eastham,—if I may put it into your hands. I have a few pounds just now which I don't want particularly—in fact I don't know well what to do with them ; and I should be glad to help Warton out of his difficulty. Will you arrange the matter ? May I trouble you so far ?"

"My dear fellow, I shall be delighted ; I am going to town in a few days : but I'll write up at once, and I shall be only too happy to have the conduct of the business. See if I don't talk stoutly to some of the creditors, and compel them to compound."

"One condition I must make, and I am quite earnest in making it—Warton must not know this comes from me."

"Certainly not, if you wish it."

"I do wish it most particularly. There are reasons just now which might render it unpleasant for Warton, or any of his family, to suppose they were under what they might be sensitive enough to consider a sort of obligation to me."

"He shall know nothing of it, depend upon that—at least for the present. I am sure, before long, he will be in a position to repay you. He has great talent, and I think the best thing he could do would be to go back to his own profession, and stick to it like a man. And then, after a while, he might come into the House, as so many lawyers do, and become Attorney-General one of these days. I don't know why he shouldn't."

Lennon was not so sanguine of the future of his old friend. He had lost all faith in Warton's career. He had seen through the brilliant shallowness of his mind, and had seen too that his nature as well as his mind was shallow. All the steadfastness and fixed purpose, without which even genius can hardly succeed, and by the help of which mediocrity can so often climb where genius fails to reach—all this was wanting to Walter Raleigh Warton, and Lennon knew it ; but he expressed no such doubts to Captain Eastham, who had still a sort of generous faith in the gifts and the prospects of the orator of the working-class.

"I am glad I spoke of this to you," said Eastham, as they were parting ; "I never thought though of expecting a helping hand from you. In fact, to speak the truth, I was quite under

the impression that this Freehold Land Company of yours, or whatever it is"—and Eastham waved his hand in the direction of the model village—"had let you in rather heavily, and left you somewhat in the condition that Epsom and Ascot have left me. I am glad to find that philanthropy, after all, is a less ruinous weakness than horse-racing. Providence does reward virtue, I now see; and as a religious member of the Conservative party I rejoice at the sight, although it profits me nothing."

This conversation took place on the road near the model village, which was now the centre whither tended all men and women and organizations destined to relieve the wants of the poorest victims of the flood. The road was now wholly passable once more. The lake had receded back to little more than the dimensions of its original basin; the torrent that ran down the pass was a brook again; the river was beginning to flow more tranquilly to the sea; and there seemed every hope that before many days no greater relic of the flood would be left behind than a few ruined hovels and a few graves. But these hopes were deceived; bad had begun, but worse remained behind.

That very night Lennon went alone through the village. He was thinking sadly enough over part of the conversation he had had with Eastham. The few words dropped by the latter about Grace Ethelstone had fallen on his heart as the cold drops in the water-torture fall on the miserable prisoner's shorn head. He turned over in his mind with the curiosity of bitterness the slight and passing phrase in which Eastham expressed his doubt whether he, Lennon, had ever noticed her. So much we know of each other! So sympathetic are we with our friends! So quick are we to see each other's sufferings! Lennon's heart was burnt with love for that girl; his life was rendered all a barrenness and a blank hideous sand-desert by her rejection of him; he chafed at the mean regularity with which the routine of his existence dragged on in darkness after its sun had all gone out; and his friend now coolly asked him whether he had ever noticed the girl, and did not even trouble himself to wait for an answer.

As he passed one of the cottages a low moaning sound fell painfully on his ear. He stopped and listened. It was not the sharp cry of a child; it was the monotonous moan of a suffering adult. A light burned in one of the windows. Lennon looked at the cottage, and studying its position and size, endeavoured to recollect who it was that had been housed

there. The cottage was one of the very smallest ; and with all the pressure that the flood had put upon them, he knew that Tom Berry and his coadjutors had been careful not to overcrowd the little buildings. Evidently this was one of the cottages into which only a single family, and that a small one, could have been received. He came to the conclusion that the family in this cottage was that of a poor fellow, a basket-maker, who had a wife and three little children, and who had lost everything but the clothes they wore when the flood washed over their miserable bedrooms. Lennon had noticed the sickly and broken look of the poor fellow that very morning. The moaning still kept on ; and Lennon thought of tapping at the door and asking if there was anybody sick, when the door was opened, and the basket-maker's wife stood on the threshold and looked wildly up and down the road and at the adjoining cottages, which were now all silent and dark. Lennon went towards her : she knew him at once.

"O, Mr. Lennon, my poor oald man be very bad. He been gan clean wrang i's heid. He's been mooanin' an' ravin', an's oot o' his senses, an' I fear he's nigh on to deeth. O, what shall I do ? I doan't know nowte to do, or how to send for doctor."

"Don't be alarmed," said Lennon ; "perhaps he's just a little feverish. I'll go and fetch a doctor."

"O, God bless ye ! for I can't leave the childer. Ooar eldest girl's hardly nene ; stiddy aneuf, but too yung to go or to leave."

"May I look at your husband first ?"

"O, coom in, coom in."

She caught Lennon's hand and dragged him in. There indeed was a sorry sight. The poor basket-maker was moaning, tossing, and talking on the bed that had been made up for him. His cheeks were aflame ; his unresting skinny hands were burning. He was in high fever. The children in their night-dresses were standing or squatting about, bewildered and scared. For them Nature had upset herself altogether during the last few days, and it now seemed their fate to be always roused from their beds at night with flood or fever or other calamity. They were all too much dazed and frightened to cry.

Lennon looked significantly at the children. "Better dress these, and have them removed out of this as quickly as possible."

"O, then it's fever my poor oald man's took with, and he'll die!"

"No, no; don't be afraid. He'll come all right again; but it's better to get the little ones out of the way, lest it spread. Keep up your courage; you'll nurse your husband and bring him safely through, never fear. I'll go for the doctor, and I'll send some one to help you."

Lennon's thoughts hardly beat time to the encouraging tune of his words. He feared of all things an outbreak of fever in the present state of affairs, with a disheartened crowd of women and children pent almost pell-mell into a few rows of cottages, and the beneficent resources of Waterdale nearly played out. He first found out Tom Berry, and set him to waken up some of the refugees somewhere and get shelter for the poor little children. Then he went home, startled old Mr. and Mrs. Beck out of their sleep, bade them get what they could in the way of nourishment and medicaments that might be useful in fever, extinguished somewhat savagely, it may be owned, a few rising grumbles on their part; then made his way to the stable, saddled his own horse, and dashed off to the town to find a doctor. "O for the helping brain and hand of some earnest energetic woman!" he thought as he sped upon his mission.

He made the doctor mount his horse at once and ride off, while he waited until the physician's steady old servant had saddled his steady old cob, on which Lennon returned. The poor basket-maker was in typhus fever. So was one of the children already. The other two were housed among the neighbours, who only contended with each other for the task of sheltering and caring for them.

"It's a bad case," said the doctor to Lennon as they stood on the road together; "and that's not the worst of the matter—the fever will spread."

"Yes; that is just what I feared."

"It will be all over these houses in a day or two, Mr. Lennon. We'll do our best; but how can we prevent it? It's idle to talk of removing them. There's no place to remove them to. This is by far the best place they can be in. The fact is that it has broken out already on the other side, in the town, down among the lanes where the flood was worst."

The doctor remained at Lennon's house for the rest of that night, to be quite ready for the work that had to be done. His forebodings came but too true. In twenty-four hours a

virulent typhus was raging among Lennon's villagers. It was indeed, as the doctor had said, on both sides of the lake, and certainly far worse in the town than on Lennon's side. But here, too, it was bad indeed, and for a time it seemed as if there must be one dead in every house. The medical resources of Waterdale were poor and small ; and the workhouse-hospital was quickly filled, until it began to be found out that the patients there died considerably faster than anywhere else, and then their friends fought against allowing sick people to enter the dreaded walls. All effort to prevent the fever from spreading proved futile. The incessant rains of the spring and summer, the soaked earth, the ruined grain, the consequent depression and want of work, and want of food, and poverty ; and then the floods, the terror and the desolation—had made the place a rank garden, manured and watered for fever to flourish in. And so it flourished. The sick died fast, and panic demoralised the living. Strangely enough, the poor basket-maker, the first stricken down, and perhaps the feeblest of all, recovered. It is not strange, perhaps, though it seemed perfectly wonderful to many of the people, that Lennon, who showed the most utter disregard of all considerations for his personal safety, and went about as freely through fever-beds as the doctors and the nurses, was wholly untouched.

CHAPTER XXV

KNOWN TOO LATE.

“OUR friend Alwyn has been telling me that you were dreadfully unpopular down here not long ago.”

“So I was. I think I had some months of as much unpopularity as the sourest cynic could desire. Of course it was for the most part of a passive kind.”

“But it sometimes became demonstrative and active, did it not?”

“Yes, a little. Once or twice. But it came to nothing.”

“Alwyn tells me that some orthodox zealot made an attempt to set your model village on fire?”

“Well, there was something of the kind conjectured, or found out, or supposed to be found out. Tom Berry made the dis-

covery—or thinks he did—in time. Certainly, he found that four of the houses were on fire at one moment, with heaps of dry straw and shavings and resin carefully adjusted ; and it did look a little as if some too ardent opponent had made up his mind to rid the earth of our cumbering presence.”

“Had you any reason to suspect who the fellows were that did it?”

“Yes, I think so. In truth, I believe it was all the doing of one man.”

“And you took no steps to punish him?”

“None whatever.”

“Did he cut the country?”

“No ; he is laid up now, poor fellow. We were in his house to-day. He is, I have good reason to know, one of those who were hurt when the rush of the flood brought down some crazy houses in the outskirts of the town yonder.”

“Then where is he now?”

“In one of the cottages.”

“Your cottages?”

“Yes. His wife and two children are there.”

“Why, that is dramatic or poetic justice indeed—that is heaping coals of fire on his head.”

“Coals of fever fire are heaped on the poor creature’s head now. He seems to me to have been a decent sort of fellow, half crazed with religious fervour. He was a believer in the Millennium ; and I fancy he got it into his head somehow that my poor building speculation was a subtle scheme for the dissemination of materialism and flat blasphemy.”

“Don’t you feel tired of this place altogether, Lennon ? Don’t you find your labour all thrown away ? Don’t you get sick of the silliness and changeableness of the people, and inclined to cut the place and never come back ?”

“Sometimes I do ; perhaps not wholly for the reasons you suggest. I am not ashamed to confess that I feel, or felt, disappointed at the result of my luckless scheme. I never anticipated any of the objections raised to it. I surveyed beforehand in my mind what I thought all the possible kinds of failure that might await it ; but the particular sort of failure that befell it never once occurred to me as on the cards.”

The speakers were Ralph Lennon and Captain Eastham. They stood at an open window of Lennon’s house, and smoked. It was late—past midnight. They could see the lake and the

lights in the little village, which but lately was so lonely, and now had become so populous. It had become so thickly peopled indeed that Lennon was thinking of making arrangements to turn his own house, with the exception of two or three rooms, into a sort of caravanserai, to receive any wandering Waterdale people for whom the cottages could not provide. Captain Eastham and he had worked pretty hard already, and were now enjoying a quiet cigar and solitude.

"Now you are quite popular," Eastham remarked—"a sort of hero, in fact, among your neighbours."

"Yes ; and for no conceivable merit of mine. My building scheme has turned out serviceable in a way I never anticipated, or could possibly have dreamed of ; and I get the honour of it."

"You bear your honours meekly, and seem to understand the secret and value of popularity almost as well as if you had been half your life in Parliament. By the way, Lennon, why don't you go into Parliament ?"

"My dear fellow, what on earth do I want there ? What could I do there ?"

"Well, of course, I don't mean to talk nonsense to you about serving your country and all that kind of thing. But I really think you might make a figure there. Let us put you up for some place here while your local popularity lasts."

"Let us ?—whom do you mean, pray, by us ?"

"Our people, of course."

"Only I happen to be a Radical."

"The very thing we want just now ; we are dying for Radicals. I tell you, my good fellow, there is more joy among us over one converted Radical than over no end of faithful and consistent Conservatives."

"Very likely. But I am not a convert, and don't ever mean to be. I mean to die impenitent, Eastham, so far as Radicalism is concerned. I wait for the time when my own views or crotchets get a chance, which time will come ; meanwhile, you have my friend Warton."

"No ; Warton's played out, I fear—for the present, at least. But that reminds me I have had a good deal of talk lately with your friend and faithful follower below, Mr. Berry ; and he has partly opened my eyes to something that was a little mystery to me before. I always knew there was an organised opposition to Warton over at Northinglen that night ; but I never

could quite understand how it was got up. Now I think I have discovered that your friend Berry was at the bottom of it all."

Lennon laughed. "I suspected as much—divined it in some way or other; but I never cared to ask. Tom has a deadly enmity to Warton."

"Yes; and he wreaked it there. *Pallas te hoc vulnere—Pallas immolat.*" As I understand, the game was to frighten Warton off the ground, and by Jove I think it succeeded. I never saw a fellow more scared. His health is weak, I believe; and he has not seemed like his old self this long time back. I am sorry for it—and for his present fix; which, however, thanks to your helping hand, we may now look on as nearly over. With a fresh start, and in a new direction, he may do well yet."

"He may," said Lennon very drily; "I think with you that he had better turn to his profession and work at it, and nourish some other ambition than that of getting out of his class."

Eastham looked quickly round at Lennon, was about to say something, then stammered, turned away, and knocked the ashes off his cigar.

"Come, you were going to say something," said Lennon, smiling; "say it."

"Well, I don't know. Yes, perhaps I was. You won't mind me, I hope?"

"Not in the least."

"Then what on earth, Lennon, do you mean by talking of his class, and your class, and my class, and so on? I don't understand it, I give you my word. You have said that sort of thing many times, already—twice to-day, I think. You are just the opposite to Warton. He gets as uneasy if anybody uses the word class when he is present as if his father had been hanged, and somebody were talking of a rope. What do you mean by people going out of their class? What's your class—what's my class? I suppose we are all gentlemen; and I don't see—excuse me even for suggesting the thing; it looks so like impertinence; but it's your own fault, old fellow—I don't see what difference there is between you and me, except that you have a good deal more money and a great deal more brains, and that you know how to make use of both, which I don't."

Lennon felt a little embarrassed. He had talked hastily and

inadvertently of "class" difference, because it must be owned that subject was sharply printed on his mind. One of his weaknesses was to remember too keenly the slights, or fancied slights, which had been put upon himself and his father years ago by the Cumberland gentry. But he felt ashamed of having betrayed a weakness which he acknowledged to himself had something of meanness in it. The word having been spoken, however, he did not intend to recall it.

"I think there are classes in this country, Eastham ; and I think nobody fights his way from one into the other without losing a good deal of his self-respect on the road. I cannot help seeing that the intruder is snubbed by those among whom he pushes himself, and girded at by those he leaves behind ; and I don't want to be in the rush, and am sorry to see anyone I care for drawn into it."

"Exactly. That's all very well as a general description or a general precept. We English are a jealous and grudging lot involuntarily. The man in always scowls or growls at the man coming in. Nobody gets into an omnibus without seeing that those already in look at him as much as to ask, 'What the devil brings *you* here?' Same thing in a coffee-room, in any place where there are chance comers—except, perhaps, the stalls of a theatre, where everyone has his own seat divided off for him, and his nearest neighbour cannot intrude. So it is with what you call classes, and nothing more. I believe in my soul that all that sort of thing people talk about classes is just like the old nonsense about the bloated aristocrat. I believe, too, it is your fault—excuse me if I identify you for the moment with the grumblers—much more than ours. Warton was very sensitive about his confounded class. I believe his father was a working man, but I never met anybody who cared three straws about the matter. Take my word for it, Lennon, all that sort of thing is out of date, and has no real place but in the *London Journal* or the Surrey Theatre."

Lennon shook his head. "Your own political chief, your adored leader, is evidence the other way," he said. "You told me yourself how hard it is to get your party to follow him."

"Yes : but it is just because they can't quite make him out, because he is not like them ; I suppose it's the old question between genius and mediocrity. He is hardly an Englishman, and he puzzles our heavy people ; and they have a vague notion

that there must be something wrong with him, as they have about a French novel or German theology. Class, as you call it, has next to nothing to do with it; how could it? Half our modern peers had tradesmen for their fathers, and the sons of the other half are going into business in the City."

Lennon laughed. "I am ashamed to argue the point, Eastham; it seems so weak and childish to think of such things at all. It looks as if a man was afraid of himself, and jealous of those who hailed from a different class."

"There goes your class again; confound your class! I tell you, my good fellow, there is no such thing in the antiquated sense you take up. You have lived too long at the other end of the earth, and you don't understand how common sense has gone ahead here in your absence. Let us say no more about it—only, believe me, you are under an obsolete delusion. I saw this in you many times; I saw how obstinately you kept away from the people round about here—the bloated aristocrats, you know—fellows, for the most part, who would have been delighted to know you, and would have understood you at least as well as your bricklayers and tramps and orthodox fire-raisers; only you would not look at them, but kept rigidly to yourself and bade everybody stand off. You won't speak to us, you scowl at us if we come near you; and then you insist that nobody in England will be received if he goes out of his class. I don't mean you in your own proper person, but you as the typical Briton of the Radical school, who is quite proud of the notion that he can repel the pampered minions of what do-you-call-it."

And after this long exposition Captain Eastham took a draught of brandy-and-water, lighted a fresh cigar, and looked at his friend for reply or confession of defeat. Lennon said nothing; but laughed, and presently passed on to the previous question.

After some further talk about nothing in particular, Eastham, for whom a carriage had long been waiting, took leave of his friend, promising to return and be his helper in the present stress as soon as he possibly could. Next day he was going to London, as a great party fight was coming off in Parliament, and Eastham's friends were now enjoying the rare delights of office, and naturally very anxious not to be robbed of them all too soon. But he promised that the moment his chief, to whose personal attendance he devoted himself, could spare him

from the House, he would return to Waterdale ; and he really meant this at the time.

This conversation was one of a good many which took place about this time between Lennon and his Tory friend. Lennon found himself of late growing more and more to like Eastham. There was a certain fresh and frank simplicity in the latter, which his natural shrewdness and intimate knowledge of the world of London only set off to greater advantage. Eastham, on his side, had readily seen the good qualities, the ability, the manly, true nature that lay beneath the crust of Lennon's shy and proud reserve. So, not having one single opinion on any vital question in common, not mingling in the same spheres,—brought together only as two circles might be, just at one point, and reuniting nowhere else,—they respected each other, liked each other's ways and talk, and were, indeed, much better friends than old associates or social colleagues often are.

The conversation just related had noticed one change that lately came over Lennon's life. He had been, as we know, unpopular, even odious, in Waterdale. When his unpopularity culminated—for example, about the time preceding his last visit to London—a Sassenach landlord, newly come into a Fenian county, could hardly have been an object of more open and sincere dislike. It was quite true that there had been an attempt to burn down the poor Phalanstery ; but that attempt Lennon thought little of, as it was really the work only of one half-crazy fanatic who had gotten it somehow into his head that anything connected with secular and undenominational instruction was likely to put off the Millennium. The general and open repugnance exhibited towards Ralph and his henchman on both sides of the lake would have been hard to bear under ordinary circumstances. Of late Lennon bore it very composedly, and sometimes even could not help finding fault with himself for his indifference. For the cause was only too patent. He found himself armed against popular enmity in a panoply of his own personal emotions. The populace hissed him, and he cared nothing for the hisses, because he thought of Grace Ethelstone, and wondered whether she loved him. His philanthropy was shot dead by a glance from a girl's eye. His stoicism against public opprobrium was nothing higher or stronger than an absence of interest in anything but the woman whose simple, unaffected nature had fascinated him.

The Knight of the Gentle Armour, who faced without fear the lances of his adversaries while he wore no stronger cuirass than his mistress's garment, might, in one sense, be a type and illustration of the kind of courage and constancy with which Ralph Lennon had confronted the worst that could be done by the public opinion of his Waterdale neighbours. He was hated, but he was hopeful and happy.

Now all had changed. Nobody in Waterdale was any longer to be compared with him in popular favour. The people adored him. The long, true, disinterested service and labour of Dr. Alwyn counted for the moment as nothing when compared with the impulsive exertions and easy sacrifices of Lennon. It was quite true, as Eastham had said, that the gentry of the place were filled with sincere admiration for the individual whom, a few weeks before, one of the number had pleasantly talked of as "the returned convict," and "the ticket-of-leave man." There was not a hall or castle for many miles round which would not have welcomed him eagerly among its guests. Distant Carlisle and Kendal were familiar with him, and claimed him as a local hero. Preston had frequently made allusion to him in the leading article of its most influential newspaper; nay, his fame had actually reached Liverpool; and a paragraph in a Manchester daily paper—a paper having a circulation of ever so many thousands, and positively read in the Reform Club and the library of the House of Commons—had talked of him as a possible candidate in the Liberal interest for a northern borough.

He bore his popularity as he had borne the ill-favour of the public. He did not care anything about it. He scarcely heeded it, or knew much of it; and when it came in his way he quietly repelled it and bade it stand aside. It was of no avail to him. His house was as lonely as before; his heart was far more lonely, for its great hope was gone. The kind of life he led naturally favoured, and even compelled, a meditation, and brooding, and self-questioning which made that life, sad as it was, even more morbid; and he was beginning gradually to lose any faith in himself, his own purposes, and his own nature, as he more and more clearly saw how much of selfishness there was at the root of everything he had done. It was to relieve his own mind, to perform a sort of penance in fact, that he had gone to work at his philanthropic scheme in Waterdale. When the scheme failed he bore its

failure with the apparent composure of a hero and a philosopher. Why? Because by the time failure became apparent, he had nearly lost all deep interest whatever in the project or the place, and found his heart wholly occupied by the love of a girl. Then, when there came another chance of utilising his resources and doing some good, he set to work chiefly that he might relieve his own mind of the weight of personal disappointment cast upon him when his love was repelled. At the present moment he could not conceal from himself that his heart was so filled with Grace Ethelstone as to have hardly any room left for deep and true feeling on any other subject. He looked upon the suffering that was all around him almost as a preoccupied spectator looks on a picture or a stage-play. He moved about, and worked, and projected, and did this for one sufferer, that for another, in a perfunctory and absent sort of manner, his heart not being in the thing at all. And he had the manliness to be ashamed of this. When anyone praised him—and most were ready to praise him now—he rejected or evaded the compliments, and felt humbled and ashamed by them. He sometimes thought of the old story of the monk supposed to have died in the odour of sanctity, and whose corpse, laid in its yet open coffin near the altar, amid the incense and the chanting of the almost adoring brethren, suddenly sat up, reanimated for a moment by the returning soul, and proclaimed in awful tones to the horrified listeners the just condemnation of him whom they revered.

So it followed that Lennon was as lonely as he ever had been. He suffered acutely when alone, and yet could endure but little companionship. Be it understood that his feelings made no public show, and one should have known him very well indeed to know that any inward pain consumed him. Demonstrative people have an immense advantage in so far as they can give their emotions head, and let them tire themselves out, as a man of sense when his horse runs away with him takes care to let the animal have all the running he wants, and more, and so finds him easy enough to deal with before long. Lennon hardly ever gave his emotions head of late years, and so the strong passion which now possessed him threatened to outlast his time. It would have been a relief to him if he could storm and rage against fate and everything else now as in the old days; but he could not. For he now blamed fate no

more, but only his own weakness altogether ; and he was ashamed of himself that any passion could have so conquered him, any disappointment so stricken him down.

He walked up and down his room the night after Eastham had left him, smoking and thinking, and sometimes glancing anxiously out of the window down at the cotages. Tom Berry had promised to come up to the house and tell him how things were going before betaking himself finally to his own rest for the night. Lennon began to grow uneasy because his follower did not come. He looked at his watch and found that it was one o'clock. He wondered whether anything evil could have befallen Tom, and was resolving to go and look for him, because Tom's punctuality in general was such that his delaying beyond a prescribed time was quite a matter for surprise or alarm. Just as Ralph had made up his mind that he really must go, he heard at last a step on the damp, clayey, grass-grown soil of what might have been a lawn or a garden in front of the house. He looked out, and saw a dark figure hurrying up. He went out and opened the door—Mr. and Mrs. Beck had been comfortably in bed for hours—and he admitted Tom Berry. Tom looked pale and disturbed.

"Well, Tom, how are things going now ?"

"Bad, very bad," replied Tom, shaking his head. "I don't rightly see how they could be looking much worse. I don't know what some of these poor creatures are to do. It's dreadful to hear the women going on, and the children. Well, he's dead."

"Who is dead ?"

"That poor chap with his Millennium—the poor buffer that wanted to burn us out. God help him ! He's gone. I've just left his wife, and she's like one out of her mind."

"Poor fellow, and poor woman—far more to be lamented than he."

"O, yes, he's right enough, bless you : and he took it all very well, and died as happy as a chap could be, talking such awful nonsense about his Millennium that it would bring tears into your eyes to hear the half of it. I was with him to the last. We had become great friends latterly, we had."

"Had he his senses ?"

"In the end, yes ; an' he knew me right well, an' told me he'd meet me in heaven some day, though I didn't believe in the Millennium ; which was a deal more liberal of him, sir,

after all, than a good many of our friends in these parts would be, under the circumstances. I didn't mind *him* much, but the sight of the wife and the kids rather knocked me over."

Tom's pale face looked quite that of one who had been a good deal knocked over.

"Take some brandy-and-water, Tom ; it will revive you. This is a sad business."

Tom helped himself to a little brandy-and-water—a very little ; he was the feeblest of drinkers, although he always scouted teetotalism.

"Yes, it's a sad business, Mr. Lennon, and one doesn't get used to it somehow. I thought, after a few days of hard experience, one wouldn't mind it much, but I don't find that it comes anything easier. I wonder how long it takes to season a grave-digger, or an undertaker, or an 'ospital nurse?"

Lennon was not in a position to give any statistical information on this subject.

"I think, Tom," he said, after a moment's silence, "I had better go down and see if there is anything to be done for that poor woman and her children."

"Nothing to be done for them to-night," replied Tom authoritatively. "I've seen to all that can be done—it ain't much, poor things ; and there's no need of your going down at this hour. Don't you be overdoing the business, sir. It strikes me you've done quite as much as is good for you, or for any of us, already."

"How so, Tom ?"

"Well, I don't quite know ; but you don't look just like yourself lately. I've noticed it for days back ; you've been working too hard, and not having sleep enough, and going into all kinds of danger. Now don't you keep on in that way. *You'll* be getting fever next ; and then what are we to do ?"

"Not I, Tom. Persons like me don't come to any harm in these matters ; only poor fellows with wives and large families succumb, I think."

Tom shook his head gravely. "Seems like that certainly," he said, "as things go ; but a man mustn't rely too much upon that, even though he thinks nobody would miss him. But we should all miss you ; and so you ought to take care of yourself."

"My good fellow, I do take care of myself. I have been here quietly for a couple of hours drinking brandy-and-water with

Captain Eastham, while you were looking after the sick. If that be not taking care of myself, tell me what is."

The sound of Captain Eastham's name set Tom off on a new track.

"He's a good fellow, Captain Eastham," Berry observed; "a very good fellow for a Tory and a swell. I didn't think I could ever like one of that class so well. There's something open about him, and generous, and liberal. I wonder if there are many of the lot like him."

"What lot?"

"Well, the Tory lot—the aristocrat lot. I don't think there can be——"

"I daresay there are some tolerably decent fellows among the Tories, Tom."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Tom, meditatively. "Perhaps there are. I suppose half these fellows don't really know that they are keeping the working men of England out of their rights."

"I suppose they don't, Tom. I don't think Captain Eastham would knowingly keep anybody out of his rights."

"But they are," interjected Tom, looking almost severely towards his patron.

"Are—what?"

"Keeping the working men of England out of their rights—aren't they?"

"Well, Tom, I think the working men of England have not got all their rights yet. I don't quite know who is most to blame for it; but I think Eastham a fine liberal fellow for a Tory."

"O, so do I. He spoke to me the other day about Northingen and the election. We had a deal of talk over it; and I think he managed to get out of me something about the way that little lot was managed, and Wat Warton done out of his chance."

"Yes, Tom, so he told me. Indeed, I thought I saw your handiwork pretty plainly in that business. I don't know that it was all quite fair."

"Why not, Mr. Lennon? Whose fault was it if he hadn't the pluck to persevere? If he'd had the heart of a cock-sparrow he'd have carried all before him. *You'd* have had it all your own way, I'll wager, if you'd been in his place—or Captain Eastham either."

Lennon felt a certain sort of compunction at having been in any way, though never so indirectly, a sharer in the overthrow and humiliation of his old schoolfellow. Truly, except in having imported the irrepressible Tom Berry into the neighbourhood, he had literally nothing to do with the business; but he could not help feeling a twinge of regret that even in that remote and unconscious way he had contributed to Walter Warton's discomfiture and damage. He turned back to the immediate question of their present lives.

"Then you think there is nothing to be done to-night, Tom, for anybody in the cottages?"

"Not a thing. We must wait and see what to-morrow'll bring. It's a bad business altogether, and I wonder who'll see the end of it."

There was a tone of despondency about Tom as he spoke these words which smote painfully on Lennon's ears. Tom was usually so full of courage and good heart, so resolute to make the best of everything in ordinary life,—perhaps because his way was to make the worst of everything in politics,—that any expression of doubt or dread came with a peculiar and ominous significance from him. Lennon looked keenly at him. As they stood now, Tom was near the door, just where he had come in; and the lamp, the only lamp in the room, was so placed that its light fell on Lennon, and Tom was left in shadow. Lennon quickly but quietly changed his position, and placed himself where he could see Berry's face plainly, and study its expression. Tom was looking down now and gently beating his hands together—the back of one in the palm of the other—as he repeated almost unconsciously the words: "It's a bad business altogether; I wonder who'll see the end of it?" His face was usually colourless, but just now there was a kind of transparent pallor over it; and his forehead was damp, and his mouth was quivering and twitching. He looked up suddenly, with eyes of unnatural brightness, and caught Lennon's uneasy expression. Lennon was a little embarrassed at being thus caught. Tom shuffled his feet, and twisted his fingers, and made a grand effort to look very cheerful.

"Take a little more brandy, Tom," said Lennon.

"No, thank ye, sir; I'd rather not. I—I feel so very well—so very well!"

A deeper shade came over Lennon's face. He did not like

to hear such an uncalled-for and spontaneous assurance on Tom's part that he was so very well.

"And now, sir, I think I'd better be going."

"I think you had much better stay here to-night, Tom. There is a bed to spare, you know, such as it is."

"Don't mention it; no no. I'd much better go. I'll be wanted down there at all hours in the morning; and I ought to be at my post."

"But are you sure you are all right? are you quite sure that you are perfectly well?"

"Lord bless you, yes! Never better in my life. You don't imagine anything is going to happen to *me*, sir? Not a bit of it. I'm a seasoned old hand; sickness don't ever think of minding me, because it knows I don't mind it. What's going on down yonder" (and he pointed in the direction of the village) "is nothing, one might say. You should have seen some of our courts in Southwark in fever time; and them even I'm told are nothing to Shoreditch and Bethnal Green. There you might talk of sickness, where there's neither air nor water. Here, why bless you it's nothing!"

Tom's own argumentative power, as usual, somewhat brightened him up, and he began to look more brisk and cheery. Lennon hoped the fears he had been entertaining were only vague. Yet he would have pressed his brother-labourer not to leave the house, but that, in the first place, he thought it might be a very unwise thing to communicate his fears to Tom; and in the next place, Tom was in some ways as obstinate as a mule, and when once he thought he ought to be somewhere, or to do something, argument and exhortation were wholly thrown away upon him. So Lennon did not attempt to resist Tom's determination to return to his post, which post was part of a cottage, now more than half occupied by a poor family, of whom Tom was patron and care-taker.

Tom went away, and whistled as he went—not for want of thought, nor to keep up his spirits, but to give Lennon the notion of a man positively exuberant with health and strength.

"He was uneasy about me," thought Tom, as he trudged rather heavily along. "I saw it at once; but it's all nonsense. I'm a little tired and queer, that's the whole of it. In the morning I'll be all right—I think. I'm not going to give in and take fright for a bit of a cold shiver, anyhow; but it's kind of him. Ah, I wish I saw *him* looking a good deal better than

he does now. I hope he's not going to get knocked over. No ; I don't think it's that is wrong with him—not that sort of fever. Who'd 'ave thought he'd take such a thing to heart so ?”

So, pursuing his thought, whatever it was, as to the reason for Lennon's altered condition, Tom reached his home, opened his door as softly as he could, and crept quietly in. He felt very faint and queer, and the moment he got into bed fell into an odd, unrefreshing, semi-lethargic kind of sleep, in which he seemed to be half awake and to be talking to himself all the night through.

When Berry left the house, Lennon looked after him until he wholly disappeared in the darkness. Then Ralph returned to the room in which Tom had found him ; and he began pacing up and down as before. “ I fear that poor fellow has been over-exerting himself of late,” he thought. “ I hope nothing bad is going to happen to him. What an unselfish being he is ! What a rebuke and reproach he is to most of us ! I never thought about him these last few days, or how he might overtask himself, or what danger he might be in ; because my mind was filled with my own trumpery grievances and disappointments. That's a regular genuine hero—that poor fellow ; and he does not know anything about it himself ; and who appreciates him or cares for him ? Not I, certainly, seeing that I never heeded for days back what became of him. Truly I have reason to be proud of myself, and I do well to set up for philanthropy and beneficence, and all the rest of it—I who could have seen all around me go to ruin so long as I thought Grace Ethelstone cared for me !—I who, while half a village is dying close at hand, can hardly bring my mind to think of anything but my own disappointment because that child could not be talked into loving me.”

He leaned out of the window, and looked long and thoughtfully down upon the village. The lights were all extinguished there now ; but a late moon was arisen, and the white walls shone in her rays. Every house could be seen separately, surrounded as it was with its little special garden and enclosure, which Lennon had hoped to find one day all blooming and happy. He had gone to work to make a little terrestrial paradise, a tiny health-island and Happy Valley ; and behold it had come to be useful at last—in the capacity of a fever hospital ! It would require some heart, he thought, to bear quite up against such satirical strokes of Fate. But a model village turning into

a lazaret-house is perhaps a fitting appanage for an elderly philosopher who falls in love, is disappointed, and turns into a maundering fool.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MYRA MAKES A DISCOVERY, AND PROFITS BY IT.

MYRA ALWYN and her husband were active with the earliest and the best of those who did battle against the pestilence. But their efforts were for the most part confined to their own side of the lake—to the town ; and Lennon saw but little of them. Tom Berry, who often had to go into the town, made enthusiastic reports of them, and seemed ready to admit that the hired priest of a State Church might be a brave man, a charitable man, and a Christian.

Myra always welcomed a word from stout Tom Berry, for whom she had come to have a high admiration, and who actually began to feel a sort of veneration for her, fine lady though she was. And as he always told her something of Lennon's doings, even if only a dozen words passed between them, she knew that her distant fellow-soldier in the fight was still on his feet, unhurt and active.

But there came an interval during which she saw nothing of Tom Berry. Days passed away without his making his appearance, and she began to grow uneasy. It was a strange thing that she could not bring herself to speak to her husband on the subject, and ask him to go and see if his friend Lennon was ill.

One evening—an evening she remembered long after—she came home late and tired and melancholy. She had been to see some sick families, and felt weak and dispirited, so much so that Dr. Alwyn insisted on her returning home, and leaving him to make other visits alone. He promised her that he would endeavour not to be late. She sat in the library where he generally wrote and worked, and where he and she sometimes had tea of evenings when they were alone. It seemed less dismal now to sit there than in the large and dreary drawing-room. It was a dull heavy evening of late summer. She sat idly over a cup of tea that was growing cold, and

longed for her husband to come home, and wondered if she was going to take fever, and wondered if Lennon was sick.

The maid who came into the room when she rang for lights looked so big with some piece of news, that Myra at once said :

“ Well, Jane, what is it ? ”

“ Please, ma’am, David ” (the groom) “ says there’s some one sick at Mr. Lennon’s. ”

“ I knew it ! ” exclaimed Myra, standing up, all flushed and trembling. “ Who told David ; what does he know about it ? ”

“ Well, ma’am, he says he met somebody who told him that the fever was at Mr. Lennon’s, and that old Mr. Beck and Mrs. Beck ran away with fright ; and he saw Mr. Beck afterwards, and Mr. Beck would not wait to tell him anything, but only said if people brought fever into the house when they needn’t do so, he and his missis weren’t going to be cut off for anybody. ”

“ What brutes ! ”

“ Yes, ma’am. I always thought Mrs. Beck a hard-hearted bad old woman, ma’am, after the way she went on to poor Bessie, her niece. ”

Myra stood for a few seconds irresolute, and with beating heart. She looked at her watch. She saw that she could hardly expect her husband back for two hours. “ Too long to wait—too long, ” she said to herself. “ He would be the first himself to blame me if I waited so long. Why should I not go ? Were it a common stranger I would not delay half an hour. ”

Then she turned to the girl :

“ Jane, tell David to get my pony at once, and bring it round. Let him not lose a moment—he is to come with me. ”

She wrote two lines to Alwyn, saying she had heard bad news of Mr. Lennon, and had made up her mind to go and find out the truth for herself, and try to give some help if necessary, and that she hoped to return immediately ; and then in five minutes she had on her riding-habit, and was ready to mount her pony. All melancholy, morbidness, qualmishness, dread of coming fever for herself, had disappeared, swallowed up in the strong excitement and anxiety and the eagerness to give her woman’s help in the hour of danger. “ There is no one with him, ” was the thought that came up again and again in her

mind. "He is left uncared-for, and he will die, and I did not know of it in time—and I might have saved him."

"It is not wrong to go to him." Thus, too, she told herself as she impelled her spirited little pony faster and faster over the rough and broken road. "It cannot be wrong. I go to him only because he is sick, perhaps is dying, and has no other woman near him. I had conquered all—nearly—before this. I avoided meeting him; I shrank from him; I made him think that I disliked and dreaded him until I saw that he drew back from me, and thought me a cold and narrow-minded and miserable creature. No human eye or intelligence could ever, ever have pierced to my true feelings; and I was penitent even for what I felt and what I could not help. And I *am* penitent, and Heaven knows it, and sees that my motive now is sincere and pure, and will bring me through all trial, and strengthen me not to betray myself, and will forgive my weakness, and teach me to conquer it in the end."

She never for a moment thought of the possibility of anyone but Lennon being the victim of fever in Lennon's house. Indeed, if the story was true that his old housekeeper had deserted him, there was no one else that she knew of living in the drear old building.

It was now quite dark as she rode through the fever-stricken village, followed by her groom. She rode past many houses where at another time she would have stayed to inquire for some suffering inmate; but now she never drew bridle there. At last she came in sight of Lennon's house. It was desolate as the halls of Balclutha. The fox looking out of the window with the rank grass waving over his head would have seemed quite as natural and appropriate a spectacle there as among the ruins of the Ossianic heroine's natal castle. Only in one window a light twinkled.

Myra dismounted, and motioning to her groom to keep back, she ran up the grass-grown dank stone steps herself, and knocked softly at the door. The dismal echo seemed to reverberate through her own heart. The knock brought no answer. She knocked again a little louder, then again louder still. At last she heard the sound of coming feet, and a heavy tread in the hall, and the door was opened by Ralph Lennon.

In the dusk and gloom she did not at first know who it was, and the confusion of her thoughts dazed her vision. She only saw that a man stood there. It might be Tom Berry, or the

doctor, or anyone but the man who really stood before her. Nor did Ralph at first know who his visitor was. Her broad-leaved cavalier hat quite shadowed her features, and the skirts of her riding-habit, gathered over her arm, confused the outlines of her figure. It was her voice which told her name.

"How is Mr. Lennon?" she asked, almost breathless. "I have heard that he is sick. Is he very ill; and can I do anything?"

"Mrs. Alwyn!"

The blood rushed to Myra's heart and through her cheeks. She could hardly stand with excitement and surprise.

"O, Mr. Lennon! I never thought to see you thus!"

"Why, O why have you come here? Mrs. Alwyn, you must not cross this threshold or stay here a moment; why have you run such risk?"

"I came because they told me—somebody told me—that you were in fever, and that your servants had deserted you. Why should I not come? What is the danger?"

"Fever is here, Mrs. Alwyn; and death, I fear, will shortly be here; and you must not venture into our danger."

"But you are well—I thought to find you dying! And who, then, is sick?"

"My poor friend, my poor faithful friend, Tom Berry. Caring nothing for himself, he is now a victim; and because he only thought of others, so now he is deserted and left alone. Yes, that cowardly and base old man and woman deserted the house because I brought him here."

"Then is there nobody—literally nobody—in the house but you and he?"

"Nobody, since noon to-day. *They* promised to send someone, but no one comes. The people here are debased by their panic terror."

"Thank Heaven I heard what I did, and came!"

"Thank Heaven indeed; and thank you, Mrs. Alwyn, for your courage and your generous kindness. But you must not remain here running useless risks. Enough that you have come; your coming relieves me from a cruel difficulty. *You* will see that proper assistance and attendance are sent; and I shall never forget that you came when no other living creature ventured near. Now, good-bye. No, no, you must not stay."

She had come into the hall. "You do not think I am a

child," she said, "or an old woman like Mrs. Beck? You do not suppose I am afraid of fever? By how many fever-bedsides do you think I have been to-day? Can men never understand women?"

"But your husband—what would he think of your exposing yourself to useless danger?"

"I know what my husband would think if he heard that I turned away from the bedside of any human creature whom I could help because there was a chance of my catching a breath of infection. I know what he would say if he heard such a thing, and believed it; only I know, too, that he couldn't believe it. Pray, Mr. Lennon, don't think you can teach women another kind of principle from that which you practise yourself. You don't do selfish and cowardly things yourself; believe me, neither do I. For the present—that is, until you find a better nurse—I mean to look after poor Tom Berry; and I hope, with Heaven's help, we may bring him safely through."

Myra was now quite too composed and resolute to give the least chance for further remonstrance. She told Lennon, first of all, to let her see poor Tom; and Lennon led the way to the room where his friend was lying. It was Lennon's own bedroom: Myra saw that at a glance, by the books and papers. Tom was tossing from side to side, and was delirious. He was talking now to "Mary," his dead wife, and bidding her keep up her courage, and telling her things would come right enough soon—never fear! Then he was remonstrating with some of his fellows on their apathy and their down-trodden contentedness. Then he spoke as if to Lennon, and said some voluble words in a low tone, of which only a few were intelligible to Myra. But she heard distinctly—"You take care of him, Mr. Lennon. Never trust anything to Wat Warton. He's a man to play you a nasty trick some day. Mind what I say."

The colour came crimson to her face, and she dreaded to look up for a moment.

"How long has he been delirious?" she asked, after a pause.

"Only a few hours. Do you think him in danger, Mrs. Alwyn? O, my poor fellow—my poor, honest, manly Tom Berry! One of the finest creatures I ever knew. I brought him here, Mrs. Alwyn—brought him here to die! Everything

has gone wrong with me since I came here ; and is this poor fellow now to be a victim ? ”

Lennon's emotion was a strange and touching sight to Myra. She had never supposed that he could thus be moved. It filled her with a kind of alarm, and at the same time threw upon her a consolatory and soothing part which she had never expected to have to perform for him. He had always seemed to her so cold and self-contained, that she hardly knew how to deal with him now that he appealed to her in a faltering and husky voice for encouragement and sympathy. She laid her hand gently and soothingly on his arm. Compassion always puts out its hand and touches the object it would heal and strengthen.

“ Dear Mr. Lennon, you need not, I am sure, fear the worst for this poor fellow. You know how many recover every day —after all, only the few die ; and poor Tom was always so strong, and, unlike many of our people here, so temperate, that I cannot think there is much fear for him. But you know that we must not stand here lamenting over him. We must do something.”

“ Yes, yes. What can we do ? ”

“ First, you had better leave me here—I am certainly a better qualified nurse than you ; and you take David's horse and go to the dispensary, and get one of the doctors to come at once, and give some directions about a nurse : and, in fact, they'll tell you at the dispensary all about it. David can walk back and tell Dr. Alwyn what has happened ; for, indeed, Mr. Lennon, I left a message for my husband which will alarm him. I heard that you were in fever, and I came here at once. Now go.”

“ And you will remain here alone ? ”

“ Why not ? I am not afraid of fever ; and if I were, it would be none the less dangerous because somebody remained to take care of me.”

Lennon disappeared. He was relieved by being set to do something. He gave Myra's groom her message, and then started on his own mission.

Myra did not fear being alone ; the presence of Lennon embarrassed her, although the earnestness of the duty she had undertaken swallowed up conventionality and small feelings of any kind. She had had, even before the present outbreak of pestilence, some experience of fever-beds, and she knew there

was nothing to do for Tom Berry just now but to keep him cool and give him water, and let the pure air from the hills breathe in now and then through an opened window. It was melancholy work, however, sitting by that bedside in the lonely summer night, with the darkness of the mountains glooming through the panes ; until at last a sad white moon came up, and, gliding on like a Banshee, almost startled Myra at first with its livid sepulchral light. "Pale angel of destruction," the Aladdin of the Northern poet calls the moon as it looks in upon him through the bars of his prison. Myra, watching by the bedside of a fevered man, felt the full meaning of the words. The sad luminous face gazing in seemed to her excited fancy like that of the death-angel come to look upon the ruin he was doomed to make.

Tom Berry broke out every now and then into a fresh outburst of semi-articulate talk. There was a great deal about Lennon in it, and about Warton—and at last Myra caught her own name.

"Tell you again, he is a downright scoundrel ! Don't you see the way he follows *her*—Mrs. Alwyn, Parson Alwyn's wife ? She's a brick of a woman, too, though I took her for a fool once ; and she has spirit enough to cow Wat Warton if ever he shows himself to her in his true colours. I see it—I understand 'em all ; I understand Mr. Lennon, and I'm proud to know him. Something's wrong with him now—can't think what it is ; that girl must have refused him—like her impudence ! He's mad about her—I saw it long ago. He never speaks a word—O, no ; he has no talk ; but I saw it. She's a pretty girl, too, and clever, and if she wasn't Warton's niece I might like her, and be glad to see him married to her. What's her name ? I can't remember it. What's her name, again ?"

He raised himself in the bed, and looked with eyes of impatient inquiry at Mrs. Alwyn. He did not recognize her in the least, but seeing somebody there, he put his question, "What's her name, I'm asking ?"

"Grace," replied Mrs. Alwyn softly.

"Grace what ?"

"Grace Ethelstone."

"Yes, to be sure ; how did I manage to forget it ?—I'll forget my own name next ! My head's queer. Grace Ethelstone—a pretty name, too. He's mad about her, Mr. Lennon

is. He's wild in love with her, Mary ; and she must have thrown him over, or they must have had a quarrel, and that's upset him. Don't you remember, darling, that quarrel we had once—long ago—when I thought you wouldn't marry me, and I got drinking, and then I got into a fight, and all that? You're very well now, Mary, quite well now. You were very sick a little while ago, but the fresh air will set you all to rights again. I'll get a job of work down in the country, and we'll be in the green fields for a bit, girl."

Then the talk began to grow more and more voluble, less and less coherent, until at length it lost itself in mere babblement, and finally was hushed altogether. But Myra had heard enough to convince her that there was more than a gleam of meaning in the poor fellow's words. She felt a deep pang of shame and grief to think that any eyes and heart but her own should have possessed themselves of the purpose of Warton's attentions to her. She thought with dread of the hired nurse coming to hear such talk ; and if she could possibly have ventured on such a course, she would have insisted upon remaining at Berry's bedside herself, and alone, until he recovered. But even the sensation called up within her by the allusions to herself and to Warton did not diminish the surprise and emotion with which she heard that Ralph Lennon loved Grace Ethelstone. And she believed it ; and she was glad of it. To say that she heard it without one pang of personal pain would be idle. Virtue, alas, cannot so inoculate our age but we shall have our touches of heart-disease, and our morbid shootings of shameful pain. But this first wrongful natural pang over, her healthy womanly sense returned, and she was glad that Lennon loved, and refused to believe that his love could fail to prosper.

Is it incredible that a watch of some few hours should have purified a woman's heart of the one slight taint that was in it, and left her with an affection which was all clear and true and friendly, and could bear the light of Heaven ? Is it incredible ? Yet in this case it is true. All that was disinterested, loyal, and magnanimous in Myra's nature rose up within her when she heard that Lennon too loved, and the supremacy of her better self was vindicated. With her head buried in her hands, she found relief during the struggle in profuse and passionate womanly tears—tears which, perhaps, even Virtue need not have been much ashamed of ; and she felt herself restored to life

again. The crisis of *her* fever had come and gone while poor Tom raved and tossed on the bed over which she watched.

Lennon returned after a long delay with the doctor and a nurse. Mrs. Alwyn must return home. She had not had time even to change her habit—and think, ladies, what it is to do the duties of sick-nurse with ever so many yards of cloth skirt gathered up over your arm! Her groom had to be sent on another errand back to the dispensary, which was now kept open all night; and Myra would not wait for his return, but declared she would rather impose on Mr. Lennon the trouble of escorting her home, or ride home alone, than stay any longer. “My husband has not yet returned,” she said, “and I should be very glad to get home before him, and save him from such an alarm as the note I told you of, Mr. Lennon, would have caused him. Come with me.”

Lennon was surely not unwilling. Perhaps if the doctor had spoken unfavourably of Tom Berry he might have felt an inward struggle against a proposal to leave his friend even for an hour. But the physician was very hopeful, and there was really nothing to be done for Tom but to leave him in the care of the nurse.

It was past midnight when Myra and Lennon rode by the lake. The night was bright, and they rode fast.

“My mind is much relieved, Mrs. Alwyn,” said our friend.

“And mine,” she answered, with half a sigh.

“I think poor Tom will recover; and if he does I am sure he and I owe his life to you. How kind and thoughtful and brave you are! I never—” and he stopped awkwardly.

“You never thought I had anything in me worth knowing?”

“O, pardon me, no. I was not going to say that.”

“No matter. I don’t care to have it amended. We mistook each other, Mr. Lennon; let us own it frankly. I took you for an infidel, did I not? Did you not give yourself out for one? And now I know you for a Christian. Ah, if we had many such! You took me for a mere, formal, good-for-nothing——”

“O pray, Mrs. Alwyn, spare me—don’t be cruel. Do spare me.”

“At least you did not understand me; and I did not understand you. Let us know each other better henceforward. Let us be friends, Mr. Lennon.”

She turned her face and looked fully, frankly on him. The

moon-rays fell upon her white forehead, her thick dark hair gathered up under her hat, her full deep eyes swimming in tears.

"Let us be friends, Mr. Lennon;" and she held out to him one gloved hand.

He stooped from his saddle, took the hand in his, and pressed it reverently to his lips.

"To me," he said, "you shall ever be the first and best of friends."

Did any gleam of the thoughts that filled her soul shine upon him out of the struggle of expression that her feelings wrote upon her trembling lips and in her eyes? Did he then for the first time catch a glimpse of her meaning and her heart? Perhaps so, for a strange, almost startled expression flashed across his face. But whatever thought may have arisen within him, he beat it resolutely down, and only took her hand and calmly touched it with his lips, and said the few quiet words we have written.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WARTON MAKES A DISCOVERY, AND DOES NOT PROFIT.

A FEW weeks went by, and the aspect of things was as much changed in the region of the lake as the face of the sea on a soft sunny morning after a night of storm. The fever had done its worst, and was gone. The flood was beginning to be a memory. The model village was a sort of convalescent hospital. The grass was growing thick and green already on the frequent new-made graves, among which we are glad to say none had been opened for Tom Berry. Thanks to assiduous care and kindness and skill, Tom had recovered, and was now beginning to walk about again quite sturdily. The fever had passed over the heads of Lennon and Dr. Alwyn and his wife, and laid no hand on them. Soon the old appearance would return to everything, and only those who had to mourn for the dead would think much of what had been.

Lennon had resolved on abandoning wholly his futile philanthropic scheme. Determined to leave Waterdale altogether, he begged to be allowed to bequeath the Phalanstery to Myra Alwyn, to administer it in whatever way she thought best.

"I make you my executor," he said. "You can turn it to some account—I cannot. And Tom Berry will remain to be your steward."

"Beg pardon," interposed Tom, "but there was a distinct understanding that I was to go abroad too. I'm going to Australia, where a man can have the rights of a man. I'd do a deal for this good lady, but she wouldn't ask me to stay here when I've my last chance of going where there's something like freedom." So Tom put his resolution not to leave Lennon.

"But I don't know yet that I am returning to Australia," said Lennon. "I have thought rather of the United States."

"The one thing I always longed for," calmly replied Tom, "is to live under the star-spangled banner. I like it now more than ever, seeing that it doesn't wave over any slaves. Mr. Lennon, I'm there."

"If Mr. Berry will not remain to help me," said Myra, "I must only do my best with Dr. Alwyn's assistance. But, in any case, Mr. Lennon, I accept with pleasure the office of your viceroy here—if my husband will allow me."

"Ay, marry," Dr. Alwyn struck in. "As if he did not know his place and his authority too well to attempt any refusal! I am only a constitutional sovereign, Lennon—I am allowed to reign on condition that I don't presume to attempt to govern."

"It is certain that you will go?" said Myra; "that you leave England?"

"Quite certain."

"And alone?"

"No, not alone, it seems; for my friend Tom here insists on accompanying me."

"Well, you do right, Lennon," said Dr. Alwyn. "To remain here would be only to stagnate—for you, I mean. You have no place here. We can convert your failure into a success. We know our Pappenheimers down here—and you don't, although you are native and to the manner born. They will only move here to the old music, Lennon. Thank Heaven that we can move them at all! Your new philosophy won't grow here; and let me speak frankly out and say I am glad of it, although I believe you are as good a Christian as the Dean of St. Paul's. Go and do something, Lennon. Find a stage somewhere, and play on it; and let us far off here read your name sometimes in

the playbill; and send us a friendly line now and then, and perhaps come and see us once or twice in a lifetime. Become famous if you can; but, famous or obscure, you will always be the same to your friends here."

Had Dr. Alwyn looked at his wife while he spoke thus he would have¹ seen tears in her eyes. But neither he nor she would have been ashamed. One of the things that gave him the greatest pleasure of late was to see that his wife had quite got over what he thought her dislike—her unreasonable dislike—of Lennon. He set down the change entirely to the opportunities Myra had lately had of observing the generous and disinterested qualities which Lennon possessed. The good clergyman was delighted to see his wife and his friend at last on terms of cordial and avowed friendship. The conversation just reported was one of many which happened to take place about this time.

Myra was much perplexed about Lennon's intended departure, and his apparent severance from Grace Ethelstone. The subject was one she could not venture to approach directly; but when she did once or twice say something to Ralph about Grace, she saw quite enough in his manner to satisfy her that Tom Berry's delirium spoke the truth. But she hoped soon to have an opportunity of seeing Grace herself, and she thought she might, in friendly confidence, learn something from her.

For the little party was about to break up for a while. Myra Alwyn had been peremptorily ordered by her physician to seek change of air and rest at some warm sea-side place after her late exertions and fatigue, and it was arranged that she should spend a few weeks at Folkestone.

Dr. Alwyn had some business matters to look after in Scotland, in connection with the affairs of a deceased relative to whom he was appointed executor, and that done he was to join his wife in the south. Lennon was going for a few days to London, to consult his lawyers, and make some arrangement about the disposal of what property he had still left, previous to his leaving England. He longed to be away. Only the urgent pressure of his friends induced him to consent that they should all meet once more on the old ground before he finally quitted England.

So they scattered and went their ways; and Lennon was once more in the Eleanor's Cross in London. Seated at the old table in the coffee-room, where he sat that first morning when

Walter Warton found him, he was vaguely thinking over the disappointments that had fallen on him since that day. The coffee-room was given up to himself and the waiters who flickered incessantly in and out. Other people had business or pleasure to follow, and had deserted the hotel immediately after breakfast. Lennon had only a late appointment to keep that day, and did not well know what to do with himself until the time arrived. He had read all the morning papers—at least he had read as much of them as he could by any stress of vacuity be induced to read—and had even glanced over some of the journals of the previous evening. He was standing up to go into the smoking-room, there to puff an hour away, when he heard his own name mentioned by somebody who was speaking to one of the waiters at the door; and in a moment Walter Warton entered and held out his hand.

"I met a man last night," said Warton, "who told me you were in town, and I took the chance of finding you here at your old quarters. I have long been anxious to see you."

"Have you been ill?" Lennon asked involuntarily; for Warton was looking very pale and haggard, and his hand was tremulous and hot. His dress was less careful and elegant than it used to be; the words "breaking up" seemed written on every line of his face—in his sunken, glittering, restless eyes, in his forced and wan smile, in his coat, his necktie, his gloves, his hat, in everything about him.

"No, not ill, Lennon; not illness of any bodily kind; but I have been troubled and tried in many ways. I have been disappointed, Lennon—cruelly disappointed! You cannot know what such disappointment as mine is. No matter; we can't talk here—you were going into the smoking-room, I think? Let me go with you."

They went into the smoking-room. Cigars were brought; and Warton ordered brandy and soda-water, of which he drank a mighty draught, and then rang the bell and ordered some more.

"I make myself free of your quarters, Lennon," he said, with a ghastly smile.

Lennon only nodded. He was much distressed at Warton's appearance—and of all men else he would gladly have avoided Warton at the time.

"Listen, Lennon, old friend," Warton began, striking the table heavily with his hand. "You know what going to the

devil is? You went half-way along the road yourself at one time ; but you stopped at the turning of the paths, and came back ; and you were only a boy then. Well, I am not a boy now ; and I am going to the devil ; and I shall never turn back."

"Come, come," said Lennon, "you must not talk in this grim sort of way ; things are not so bad as all that."

"You don't know——"

"Well, I have heard something—just a vague hint, perhaps—that you were a little embarrassed in money affairs—debts, and all that. But everyone has to pass through something of that sort ; and you have plenty of time and talent to retrieve yourself."

"No ; it's not the debts alone. The worst of these are paid off or staved off. Eastham managed that for me somehow. I have always found Eastham a manly, kindly fellow ; though how he managed to raise the money I don't know, for he is sadly dipped himself just now. No, it's not the debts, Lennon. I am played out ! My career is done. The infernal Tories have thrown me over—flung me away like an old glove ! I met Disraeli the other day, close, face to face, and he cut me dead. He looked me full in the face, and passed on. By Heavens, Lennon, that man was my political idol ! Eastham has done all he can for me ; but the word has gone round. They have deliberately thrown me over—for ever. I am almost ashamed to say it, but Eastham begged hard for a place of any kind for me—a colonial judgeship, a consulship, anything at all—and he was flatly refused. And to think what I have sacrificed for these men !"

Lennon writhed under these confidences ; for while he pitied Warton, he felt more and more his transparent worthlessness. He could only see in him one who tried to be a valuable traitor and failed, and then bemoaned himself that he had received no reward for his futile perfidy.

"What a happy fellow you are," went on the confiding Warton, "to have nothing to do with politics ! Serve a party, Lennon, and you'll find yourself as badly treated in the end as if you were engaged in selling your soul for a heartless woman. Ah, Heaven ! But this will only tire you out—you don't take any interest in all this sort of thing ?"

"I don't want interest in the matter," said Lennon, rather coldly ; "but I always thought, Warton, that you were playing a foolish game, and I must say a wrong game. I gave you my

opinion on that point long ago—when you asked me, and not before. Of all the Job's-comforter class, I myself least like the people who are always in a hurry to say 'I told you so,' when a friend has gone wrong ; but I always thought, Warton, you were out of your element when you threw away the principles that made you strong ; and I must say frankly I think you had no business among the swells. Confound it, Warton, what have you and I to do with earls and cabinet ministers ? ”

“ I don't quite see that a man's being born of humble parents need prevent him from rising in the world, and asserting his place as a man.”

“ No ; and neither do I. But I don't call it asserting my place as a man to pay tribute to rank by hunting after it. Rest upon yourself, Warton—your own intellect and your own ability—and you will bring yourself all right yet.”

“ I cannot ; I have heard just such advice before, Lennon, more than once. I have heard it many a time from Grace Ethelstone. *Ex oribus parvulorum*, old fellow ; out of the mouths of babes and sucklings are we solemn seniors sometimes admonished. But it's too late. My game is over. My health is gone too. That confounded fainting-trick which so ruined me at that meeting in Northinglen—a scene and a collapse I have never thought of since without humiliation—that trick has grown upon me ; and I find my eyes grow dim sometimes, and black spots dance before them——”

“ You are over-worked and over-excited. Go home, Warton, and remain quietly there for a few weeks with Mabel and the children. You will soon get strong again ; and then turn to your own profession manfully. You will find friends who will help you on. If I were your physician I would prescribe three months of quiet, unbroken, happy home life.”

“ Home life, Lennon, looks charming to you, I daresay, who do not know what it is. To me it has lost its savour—long ago. I am not happy at home—there, don't look virtuously horrified ; I am not going to make you any terrible confidences ; but it does relieve my mind a little, even to be able to hint at the truth to anybody. Do you know, Lennon, I have often thought lately that there is a good deal more meaning than we imagine in what these Ritualist fellows are doing with their oral confession ? I wish I could talk to anybody—even a Ritualist priest—exactly all that I feel ; I think it would relieve me.”

"Well, I am not a Ritualist, nor a priest," said Lennon; "but I tell you frankly, I think an evening of digging in your garden with your children would do you infinitely more good than any sickly disburdenings of your soul. A plain, frank question, Warton—can I serve you in any way? If I can I will, for the sake of old times, and Mabel and the children."

"No, Lennon, you can't. No, by Jove, and you sha'n't! I am not going to draw on your good-nature, especially when I can see only too plainly that our old friendship is stone dead, so far as you are concerned—don't say a word, man; I see it all, and I neither blame you nor wonder. I have no claim on you, Lennon, except that you have a memory of old times, and a gleam of kindly feeling for poor Mabel. I did hope for a long time that you might have thought of my niece, Grace Ethelstone. I did indeed; and believe me, Lennon, if you had loved her and married her, you would never have regretted it!"

"Miss Ethelstone," said Lennon, "has not a friend on earth who thinks more highly of her than I do. But we who are not young, Warton, we can't expect girls like her to think of us as anything but patriarchs." Lennon's effort to say these words in a cheerful and careless tone was a grim sight to see. But he remembered his promise to Grace—the promise that he would save her from remonstrances and complaints at home.

"Ah, but you are wrong, Lennon; Grace is not like other girls. You do not know what she thought of you. Mabel knows it, and I know it. It's a shame for me to betray her secret; but she loved you."

"It is not true," said Lennon, losing all self-control. "You are mistaken. Warton, you are deceived. She never cared one rush about me; or if she did, some traitor and liar set her heart against me; and by Heaven, Warton—I must speak out—I more than once suspected that you were that traitor and liar!"

Warton was utterly bewildered by this outburst of emotion. It came so unexpectedly, it seemed so uncharacteristic, that it was Warton's first and natural impulse to believe it a simulated passion. He had not time to collect what he ought to say, when a waiter came in and handed across the table a telegram for Mr. Lennon.

Lennon took it, opened it almost without looking at it, read the name, then fixed his attention steadfastly on it, and read it over two or three times. He let it fall on the table, and remained for a moment silent, hesitating, and thoughtful.

Warton's keen eyes could scan every line of the message, and he read it ; for the first fugitive glance he threw upon it showed a name which made his eyes light up and his heart palpitate fiercely.

The message was dated from Folkestone, and was sent to "Ralph Lennon, Eleanor's Cross Hotel, London," from "Myra Alwyn, Shingle Cottage, Folkestone." And it contained these words :

"Come to me at once. Leave everything and come here. I shall expect you to-night."

And Warton, who of late always followed the movements of the Alwyns as well as he could, knew perfectly well that Dr. Alwyn had gone to Scotland.

He grasped the edge of the table fiercely, to keep down his passion. The room seemed for a moment or two to float round and round him ; strange heavy sounds sang dully in his ears, and the air seemed filled with innumerable black specks and bright balls dancing tormentingly round him. For there smote upon him the hideous conviction that he had been deceived, that the love he had so audaciously thrust upon *her* had been rejected with contempt, not because it was sinful, but because it was forestalled. This, then, was the reason for Lennon's conduct with regard to Grace Ethelstone ! Warton identified her wrongs in a moment with his own. He had been mocked and flouted all through. The high-minded and virtuous Mentor who had just been preaching to him had then not only jilted his niece, but superseded him in the love of another man's wife ! He could not doubt it. The proofs were damning ; but even in that wild and whirling moment of confusion and amazement he resolved that he would have greater proofs yet.

Had Ralph Lennon not been quite wrapped up in his own conjectures and perplexity, he must have been struck by the expression of Warton's face ; but he was wholly absorbed in the unexplained message he had received, and bewildered by its genial peremptoriness. He had come to understand Myra Alwyn far too well not to know that there must be some clear and cogent reason to explain the summons ; but he was utterly unable to conjecture what her motive must be. So he saw nothing of the conflict of emotion that raged over Warton's pale and haggard face.

"I must leave town, I fear, for a short time," he said to Warton. "I have just received a telegram which calls me

away rather peremptorily. Will you excuse me for a moment, Warton? I want to see about a train, and to write a line."

Warton only nodded. When Ralph came back into the smoking-room, two minutes after, there was nobody there. Warton had gone and had left no message of any kind. Lennon had thought his manner all the day so strange, that he was hardly surprised at this fresh exhibition of eccentricity. He pitied Warton, and was sorry for him; but the distrust and dislike he had begun lately to feel towards him Lennon could not conquer. He breathed more freely now that his old acquaintance was gone.

And yet as he sat in the train which was rushing to Folkestone, and drew himself up in the seat near the window, rejoicing, as was his wont, to find himself alone, he thought with some remorse over his cold and harsh demeanour towards Warton. The haggard face, the tremulous hands, the restless eyes, haunted him. There was something sinister, ominous, and unnatural about Warton's whole appearance. Lennon's north-country birth and childhood brought him under the shadow of the old superstitions, which are as inseparable from the mountains as the mists that surround them. He was familiar with the deep expressive phrases which had floated down from Scotland, along with the weird fancies they embodied; and he knew what it was to be "fey"—to walk, as it were, under the visible shadow of death; to look and speak and act as a man who felt himself devoted and doomed—consecrated in the old classic meaning of the word. And he thought as he sat in the train—and he thought of it many and many a time after—that Walter Warton was "fey" that day. He deeply regretted now that he had not entered more warmly into the poor fellow's confidences; listened to the story of his difficulties; been less eager to find fault and blame; shown himself more frank and urgent in his offers of assistance; given at least a genial sympathy instead of a cold and lifeless attention. For the sake of Mabel, his old love—whom once, strange as it now appeared, he did indeed love, O, so deeply and so absurdly!—he might have done that much. For the sake of her whom now he loved with so different and so profound a passion, he might have turned less coldly towards one whose misfortune must at least increase her unhappiness. "Have I only played the Pharisee's part," thought Lennon, "after all? Have I set myself up for independence of conven-

tionality and scorn of the world's shabby morals only to turn against this poor fellow in his failure, whom I did not repudiate when he seemed to be successful?" And then he consoled himself with the old words: "Next time! Only wait until the next time we meet! The moment I return to London I will seek him out, and speak frankly with him, and try to be his friend."

So filled was he with thoughts of Warton that when he got out at the Folkestone terminus, and lingered a moment up and down the platform, in a kind of vague expectation of somebody coming to meet him, he actually fancied he saw Warton cross the line. He really did believe for a moment that the pale worn face and glittering eyes flashed across him and disappeared somewhere.

"My eyes are made the fools of my other senses," thought Lennon, scorning at his own fancies as usual. "I have treated poor Warton badly, and my conscience brings a ghost after me. I must make atonement when I get back."

Nobody awaited him on the platform. This was not a tidal train, and there were not many passengers, and there was none of the wild crowding and rushing and dragging of luggage and ringing of steamers' bells and puffing of steam which most of us have come to regard as identical with Folkestone. The platform was empty in a few moments, and Lennon saw that there was nothing to be gained by waiting there. A railway porter directed him to Mrs. Alwyn's address—a cottage by the sea, distant only a few minutes' walk. It was a beautiful autumn evening, and the rays of the sinking sun fell aslant upon the sea; and Lennon could discern faint across the quiet water the earthy cliffs of Boulogne. He did not quicken his pace. Now that he was on the spot, he tantalised himself after his usual fashion, and rather shrank from the disclosure, whatever it might be, which was to explain the summons he had received. But there at last lay the cottage, straight before him—a pretty imitation of Elizabethanism, with "Let furnished by the month or for the season" emblazoned in every brick and gable and pane of it; and there, to settle the matter, was Mrs. Alwyn's own maid, whose face he knew perfectly, standing at the gate. Now then for the mystery! He went up to the gate. O yes, sir, Mrs. Alwyn was in. He was expected. He went in and disappeared.

Disappeared? From whose eyes? From two keen, dark

eyes, fierce with the fire of jealousy and hatred, which had followed him.

When Lennon left Warton alone, the latter could no longer restrain his feelings. He would not wait to meet Lennon. The latter only remained away while he was finding out the time of the next train's departure for Folkestone. But Warton rushed into the street. The glare and noise of the Strand at that glowing hour of the bright autumnal day a little recalled him to composure, and at least external self-control. He made up his mind in a moment. He would watch Lennon and follow him—convict him and expose him. And *her*—yes, expose her! He would ruin and destroy them all. He would brand her in the very eyes of her husband. She should have cause to curse the day when she flung him from her and threatened him. Ah, God! did he not suspect her even then? How could he ever forget the change which came over her on the road by the lake that day—that hateful day, never to be forgotten—when *he* came in sight? And Lennon! This was his virtue and his honour and his loyalty! The hypocrisy of another seemed dreadful in Warton's eyes; and he could not think any measures unfair or wrong which tended to expose such a man. Warton gnashed his teeth with savage joy at the thought of the destruction he was about to create. "I shall be like Samson," he muttered, with fierce satisfaction, "and pull down the pillars of their respectability and their virtue with me." For he quite included Dr. Alwyn among his enemies, and was hardly less bitter against him for being Myra's husband, than against Myra herself, or Lennon, for being—what he believed they were.

Even fear no longer controlled him. It shot across him now and then with the admonishing glare of a danger-signal, but he heeded it not. He knew Lennon of old, and knowing how generous and patient he was, knew also how stern and fierce he could become; and he thought, "If I expose them all, Lennon is capable of killing me, here in this open street." But he was not to be deterred now, even by fears like that.

He bought a railway-guide, and found that the next train for Folkestone started in an hour. He drove straight to London-Bridge station, had more brandy, and then went into the second-class waiting-room. Lennon, he felt sure, would be impatient, and therefore early. In fact, Lennon reached the place half an hour before the train started. He had waited only to

write a few lines to his solicitor, and to send a telegram to Tom Berry, asking him to come to town at once and see the solicitor, in the event of his, Lennon's, not being able to look after the business in time. Warton peered through a corner of the window, dreading lest any evil chance should send Lennon into that room. At last he saw Ralph get into the train. Warton darted out, took a second-class ticket, jumped in as the train was moving off, and was carried away. In his fear lest Lennon should escape him he leaped rather prematurely out on the Folkestone platform, and had nearly come into collision with his quarry. He darted across the line and, as he felt confident, eluded observation. Then, keeping Lennon always in sight—an easy task, as Ralph did not walk quickly—he followed him at a distance to Mrs. Alwyn's cottage.

And near that cottage he waited for hours. The sun went wholly down, and, the quick darkness of a late summer evening coming on, with something of a chilly sensation, the beach was soon cleared of promenaders and nursery-maids and sand-delving children. Warton had a lonely time of it while he lingered and watched, eating his own heart.

When it became quite dark he lay flat on the strand, his feet to the sea, his face turned to the cottage. There he knew he could not be seen by anybody coming out. A long bitter watch he had. It must have been full half-an-hour after he had heard a clock strike eleven that at last—at last—he heard the door open, and presently saw two figures, a male and a female, stand upon the steps. He could not hear a word, nor could he, in the darkness, have identified the figures. They remained a few moments in close conversation; and then at last Warton distinctly saw the man take the woman in his arms and kiss her. And he could see that she clung around him. Then his eyes swam and his head throbbed; and he next saw the man come down the steps and pass out of the gate alone. The man walked slowly towards the sea—towards where Warton lay prone—and turned back and gazed at the cottage. Then he turned again, and Warton saw his face distinctly. It was, of course, Ralph Lennon. Had Lennon looked down he might easily have seen the croucher on the strand; but Warton took care at once to conceal his face. Lennon did not look down. He glanced vaguely out to sea, turned and regarded the cottage once more, and then strode rapidly away towards the town.

Warton had now no doubt. Indeed it would be too much to say that his mind, since the incident of that day, admitted any doubt ; but he came to Folkestone to have his conviction made certainty ; and now it was certainty. It was as clear to him that the woman he saw was Myra Alwyn as that the man was Ralph Lennon. It has been many times shown that from the first hour he heard that these two were acquainted he had a vague and constantly recurring suspicion. He thought he understood human nature thoroughly, whereas he only understood the nature of one man. He resolved every question in the study of motive and character by unconsciously and instinctively referring to what he himself would have desired or done under similar circumstances. As certain dreamers, brooding over phenomena which are purely subjective, create out of their own morbid mental condition whole systems of spiritualism and demonology and phantomology, and what not, so Warton constantly confounded what he saw in his own heart with observation of human character. A profound egotist, he was unable to conceive of any nature otherwise constituted than his own. He wholly wanted that dramatic and constructive power which might help even a selfish and sceptical man to construct for himself the idea of a disinterested and loyal nature. Thus, when once he had formed a suspicion, his mental presumptions were all in favour of its correctness. There was nothing in him to suggest its improbability. Whether his nearest friend was an utter hypocrite and traitor ; whether the woman who seemed purest, and whom he himself loved best, was really a liar and a wanton—these were with him mere questions of evidence. There was no preliminary revolting improbability about them. The thought of Lennon's perfidy and hypocrisy, of Myra's wickedness, maddened him, because it told of wrong done to him ; but he saw nothing in either the man or the woman, in any man or any woman, to make him recoil with disgust from the thought as something too monstrous to be entertained. And it is consoling to feel assured that, dreadfully wicked and weak and deceitful as we all are, men and women—for so our satirists and cynics tell us—the keen observer who explains everything beforehand by reference to some sinister impulse is sure to be out in his reckoning at least a dozen times as often as the simpler being whose first impression is to assume that men and women wish to do well. Many things in life were against Walter Warton. Selfishness,

sensuousness, want of perseverance, impatience, the constant desire to reap without sowing, the continual impulse to pluck up the flowers in order to see how they were growing—these characteristics were terribly against him. But perhaps his most fatal snare in life was his incapacity to believe in, or even to realise, the idea of human truth and goodness.

So he tortured himself, and cursed at fate and Heaven and his friends, or enemies—they were now all the same—and even his home and his children, and the memories of his youth, as he crouched that stern night on the Folkestone strand: while Ralph Lennon stood for a moment near him—so near that Warton stretching out his right hand might well-nigh have touched Lennon's foot. The heart and the eyes of each man were filled and dimmed by his own absorbing feelings. A halo of hope and joy shone around Lennon. The sky and the sea were sun-illuminated for him. He felt as if he "could have taken the great world in his arms and kissed it." He was enchanted with everything, with every one; earth seemed all filled with love and friendship; he could have clasped with the most fervent good-will the hand of the stricken wretch who grovelled near his feet, and who hated him and cursed him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT HE SAW.

ALL this time what had become of Grace Ethelstone? A little of her history will explain very easily any seeming mystery about the sight which Warton saw as he glared from the Folkestone strand.

Time had worn itself wearily away during weeks and weeks of Grace's darkened life. After her rejection of Lennon she went back and resumed her small sad routine of monotonous occupation in Warton's household. One only hope and purpose sustained her—the determination to get away from all old scenes, to leave England, and to engage in some artistic toil which should occupy her mental and physical resources together. Added to all the other discomforts of her present life, there was the fact that her round of vapid wearisome domestic duties left her mind free to feed upon its sorrow. So her dis-

appointment and regret preyed upon her like the vampire, and sucked the blood from her veins and the glow from her cheeks. She became pale and thin and nervous. Nay, she even became what the true heroines of romance never do become under any trial or torture—impatient and irritable. The boisterous importunities of the children were intolerable to her ; she actually hid from them when she could, until she grew remorseful for having deserted them, and then sought them out and tried to play with them in the old way, and broke down, and could not bear the pressure upon her nerves and heart any more, and had to escape again. Of course the children soon saw the change, and pitifully complained to their mother that cousin Gracie now did not like to play with them any more.

Mabel, too, must have observed the change even with her own eyes. She hovered round her niece like a large, loving, and agitated bird. She did not ask questions, but she looked them, which was infinitely more trying. Of all the aggravating and agonizing petty torments the sad heart knows, one of the very worst surely is the consciousness that its struggles are anxiously watched by somebody who does not venture to ask a question or to express sympathy. Whenever Grace looked up she found Mabel's large brown eyes fixed upon her with an expression oddly compounded of curiosity, bewilderment, and pity ; and then the eyes, being caught in the fact, looked away with sudden embarrassment, and their owner made the most elaborate and transparent attempt to seem as if wholly occupied in the consideration of some object quite at the other end of the room.

Poor Mabel's heart and mind were so transparent that her mental mechanism resembled that of the little skeleton clocks whose movements and machinery are naked to every eye. Therefore Grace could always discern perfectly well what Mabel was thinking of, and Mabel's efforts to extract gently and unperceived the root of Grace's sorrow were, from their very simplicity and ingenuousness, a cruel tantalization.

"Tell me, Gracie dear," she said one day, "what do you think of that Mrs. Alwyn?"

"Think of her?"

"Yes ; I mean do you like her?"

"O, yes ; how could I help liking her? She is so very kind."

"Do you think she is a very nice sort of woman?"

"She is very pretty, and very friendly, and clever, and does a great deal of good, I believe."

"Is she what you would call a very good kind of woman—the kind of woman one would like to be?"

Grace smiled a rather wan smile.

"I think so; I am sure she is very good, and I suppose we should all like to be pretty and good, Mabel—shouldn't we? I should feel very proud, I know, if when I looked in my glass it gave me back such a face as Mrs. Alwyn's."

"Yes; but I don't mean that, and I am sure you have no reason to envy anybody on that score. But what I mean is, I believe gentlemen admire Mrs. Alwyn a great deal; and I was curious to know whether she seemed the kind of lady who would encourage that sort of thing. I am sure I should hope not; but I thought perhaps you might have noticed."

"Indeed I don't know anything about it, Mabel; I never thought of observing. Mrs. Alwyn seemed to me to be kind and friendly to everyone, and to be very much attached to her husband. In fact, she appeared to me to act very much like any other married woman; at least I didn't observe any particular difference."

"Then you liked her, Grace?"

"Very much indeed. I am not very fond of women in general, but I liked her much."

"And do you like her still?"

"Why should I not, Mabel?"

"Then you don't believe all that about her and Ralph Lennon?"

At last the question had come direct which Grace had been expecting for moments, and vainly trying to fence off.

"O, Mabel, how can you ask me such questions? What good is there in talking of such things? I don't believe a word or a hint against Mrs. Alwyn. I believe she is one of the best of women. How can she help it if—if men like her and admire her? I am sure I should admire her if I were a man."

"Yes; but a married woman, Grace!"

"Can a married woman help being pretty and clever and bright?"

"Ah, yes, that is all very well; but you know what I mean, Grace; and you know very well that when a woman is married

she ought not to think of being attractive in anybody's eyes but her husband's."

"I don't believe Mrs. Alwyn does."

"O!"

A solemn pause followed this ejaculation. The ejaculation itself meant to express wonder and incredulity kept down by discretion and that Christian charity which thinketh no evil.

Grace did know perfectly well what her aunt meant. She knew that Mabel's meaning, put into plain English, was this: "I think I have found out at last what your trouble is, Grace. I think you are fonder of Mr. Lennon than you would acknowledge; and I am afraid he is fascinated by an odious, wicked married woman; and I pity you from my heart; and I should like to talk to you and comfort you, if I might venture on the subject." All this was unspeakable humiliation and pain to Grace; and this, or something like it, happened almost every day. Good lack! it is a trying and tormenting thing to be watched even by sympathetic eyes, when the sympathy is awkward; and mindless kindness is sometimes as much more painful than cunning malignity as a chance wound from an honest splinter of domestic firewood hurts more than the clean cut of a hostile sword.

Or sometimes the trial would come in a different way. Perhaps Mabel and Grace were sitting alone, when little Watty would storm into the room, holding up a sheet of note-paper heavily ruled with wavy pencil-lines, and blurred with huge round-hand characters, and blotted with frequent daubs of ink.

"Look here, cousin Gracie! I've been writing to Mr. Lennon; and I think the spelling is all right—two b's in 'double,' Gracie, aren't there?—and now I want you to put it into your letter and send it to him—and please may I close up the envelope myself?"

"But, Watty, I am not writing to Mr. Lennon to-day."

"O, aren't you?"

Great disappointment of expression.

"No, dear."

"Well, to-morrow, Gracie. Keep it for me till to-morrow. And please let me see when you are putting it in, and let me close up the envelope—I always like to close up the envelopes—and then I'll go with Jane to put it in the post."

"But, Watty, I am not going to write to Mr. Lennon to-morrow."

"O! And when, Gracie dear? for I want my letter to go away at once."

"Indeed, Watty, I don't quite know."

"Aren't you ever going to write to Mr. Lennon any more?"

"O, really I don't know; I suppose so, dear—I don't know."

"Why, you don't ever write to him now! It's ever so long since you wrote to him.—Mamma, why doesn't Gracie write to Mr. Lennon now?"

"I don't know, dear. Little boys ought not to ask questions—you know that very well."

"Indeed no, mamma—at least Gracie doesn't think so, for she often said I might ask her questions if I liked."

"Yes, Watty," interposed Grace, with an attempt at mirthfulness; "but then I didn't say that I meant to answer every question you asked."

"Well, but do tell me this, Gracie—do tell me this! Tell me when you are going to write to Mr. Lennon, and why you don't write to him now as often as you did."

"I wrote generally for your papa, and he is not at home now."

"Yes; but, Gracie, you know Mr. Lennon said he would be glad if I wrote to him as often as I liked, and you would send the letters with yours."

"Well, Watty," said Grace, with an ill-suppressed sigh, and very weary of the dangerous argument, "I will put your letter into an envelope, and direct it to Mr. Lennon for you, if you like, and you shall seal it up yourself."

"Thank you, Gracie. That's very kind of you; for I do so want this letter to go. Will you write anything?"

"No, dear."

"Well, then, just do wait one moment, Gracie. I want just to finish this, and I'll bring it in to you."

Watty darted away; and Grace knew that Mabel's eyes were fixed curiously, sorrowfully on her, and she chafed as she heard her aunt heave a heavy sigh.

Back came Watty in a moment or two. "Look, Gracie; I've put another line or two at the bottom. I wonder if he'll be able to read it."

Grace took the letter and read the postscript:

"P.S. Dear Mr. Lennon, this letter is all Mine for I asked cousin gracie to write to you and cousin gracie said no. So it is only my letter and cousin gracie did not do a word of it."

Out of the question that this letter could go ! So there had to be much dreary argument with pertinacious little Watty before the matter could be got rid of for that day.

Grace knew that if Mabel had not some strong suspicion of the truth of the whole affair, she would infallibly have asked at once why her niece did not write any letters to Ralph Lennon now. The question might have been trying, but the marked avoidance of it was worse. And Grace could not bring herself to make a confidante of poor Mabel. That kindly simple nature had no power of attracting confidence to itself ; it could give nothing in return but those weak condoling words which it is the natural fault of the strong and spirited to despise and to find only irritating.

Grace's determination to leave England grew and grew, and became a new source of aggravation because of the difficulties which seemed to stand in its way. These were mental and moral difficulties altogether ; indeed were summed up in the question, how to leave Mabel and the children. A selfish person would have thought nothing of them ; and even an unselfish person would have been quite entitled to consult her own happiness and her own future, where no direct claim of duty compelled her to stay. But Grace found it hard even to approach the subject with Mabel ; and in the darkening fortunes of the little household it seemed like a recreant and cowardly desertion to go away and leave them. If only a breath of prosperity blew upon the house, then indeed Grace would resolutely announce what she meant to do, and go. But only new and bitter blasts of adversity began to rush over it. Days and days went by, and there was no word of Walter Warton. Letters to his chambers in town remained unanswered. Mabel's misery became so intense that it was pitiable to see ; and it made the house unbearable. Since she discovered that her husband's health had lately been weak, and that he had had fainting-fits, she filled her mind with daily and nightly visions of him lying sick and perhaps dying, with no one to look after him. At last she said she would go up to town, to his chambers ; a somewhat spirited resolve for her, because Walter had the strongest objection to being looked after by his womankind ; and, moreover, a journey to London was quite a fearsome expedition for Mabel to undertake.

Grace offered to go and bring all the news. She had a sort of presentiment that something might have occurred which it

would be as well for Mabel not to hear. Even when little Watty offered to accompany her she refused the escort, and preferred to go alone. Walter's own many hints and expressions almost prepared her for what she was to hear; and she thought it would be only prudent to hear it first alone, and turn it over in her mind before she communicated it to Mabel. It was instinctive with every one who came into close relationship with Mabel Warton to think of her and treat her as a child, to guard her against shocks, to keep her placid and untroubled.

So Grace went to London. She knew the way to Walter's chambers very well, and knew the main tracks of the metropolis tolerably; and she was not wildly nervous at the corners of streets or haunted by rustic fear of hansom cabs and thieves. It was a great relief to her to get away from home for a few hours—a greater relief still to be doing something which might give help or comfort to somebody. She almost forgot her own trouble sometimes—only sometimes; for many buildings she passed, some of the streets she walked through, certain book-shops and picture-shops and photographers, reminded her very cruelly of Ralph Lennon, and the happy, happy days, the dear delightful holidays, when he brought her to town, and they went to the National Gallery, or South Kensington, or the Water-colour Exhibition, or the French and Belgian Gallery in Pall Mall; and when he *would* take her into book-shops and buy her some new book that everyone talked of; and when life for the first time began to seem vivid and joyous and purple-tinted. There was a confectioner's shop in the Strand which Grace remembered well as she passed it; not that there was any romantic association or artistic aroma hanging about its tarts and its Bath-buns, its decanter of port and its decanter of sherry; but one day, when Watty formed a part of the company, that youth was gratified by being taken into the shop and largely fed on the most destructive pastry; and the memory of the place was now the memory of Lennon, and of love lost and hope crushed to death. So the unromantic shop was made in a moment as sacred and as sad as a mausoleum; and Grace, going in for dear and melancholy old acquaintance' sake, tried to eat a Bath-bun, and failed as completely as though it had been compounded of dust and ashes; and she hurried out of the shop, and dropped her veil to hide the tears which she felt might hardly be repressed any longer.

She made her way as quickly as she could towards the Temple, and, "like one upon a lonely road who walks in fear and dread," she "turned no more her head," because she knew that the ghosts of happy and dead days were everywhere lying in wait for her. She was just entering the gate of the Temple which opens into Essex Street, when a handsome young man with a fair moustache drew back politely to let her pass. She hardly looked at him, but he recognized her at once, took off his hat, and addressed her by name. Then she saw that it was Captain Eastham.

"You are coming to look for Mr. Warton, Miss Ethelstone, I venture to think?" he said.

"Yes, indeed," she replied, a little surprised at his words, and the anxious kind of expression which accompanied them.

"Then I am very glad I met you; for I can save you the trouble of walking any farther, and of mounting some very dark and crazy stairs. I have just been to Warton's chambers, and he isn't in."

"I am so sorry; but I think, Captain Eastham, I shall have to mount the stairs and wait for him. I suppose he will soon return."

"No, Miss Ethelstone; pray don't waste your time. I don't think he can return until very late."

"But he is in town?"

"O, yes, decidedly. Yes, he is in town; but indeed I don't think there is any chance of your seeing him to-day."

Grace's face wore such an expression of anxiety and alarm that Eastham could not fail to see it.

"I think I had better be frank with you, Miss Ethelstone, he said, "and trust to your good sense not to make any unwise use of what I tell you. I know Warton is very anxious not to alarm his wife unnecessarily. He is in town, and he is quite well—that you can tell Mrs. Warton; but at present he is in some little difficulty, or I should rather say he *was*, for it is all on the point of arrangement now. If you come to-morrow, or the day after at farthest, it is very likely you would see him here. I can assure you that the difficulty, such as it was, is all over now; and I think you had better not know any more about it. And pray remember that I am one of Warton's most intimate friends, and only use the privilege of friendship in talking to you at all about affairs of this kind."

"I am much obliged to you, Captain Eastham. I appre-

ciate your kindness ; but this is very, very degrading." She stopped suddenly, fearing to say too much and to put it too strongly.

"Unfortunately we men are rather too well used to such things to mind it much. But, believe me, I would not have said a word of this to you, but that I saw from your manner you would either have found it all out, or suspected something much worse."

"O, don't suppose I feel anything but grateful to you, Captain Eastham, for telling me. I could not have gone back to Mabel—to Mrs. Warton—without knowing something—and——" She again became embarrassed.

"Are you returning home at once, Miss Ethelstone?"

"Yes ; I have nothing else to wait for in town."

"You go by London Bridge?"

"Yes."

"May I see you to a cab?"

"Thanks."

He walked with her into the Strand, called a cab, and put her into it. Standing at the cab-door, he said :

"Have you heard lately from our friends in Waterdale—from the Alwyns?"

"No, indeed : and I have been slow and remiss about writing to Mrs. Alwyn."

"Ah ! they have had heavy times there lately ; you have heard of the floods?"

"No, not a word." Of late no newspaper ever entered Mabel's house.

Eastham told her in a few words. "I only came from the scene the other day," he said : "Mrs. Alwyn behaved like a regular trump—a heroine I mean ; and Lennon's houses are turned to good account at last. What a fine fellow Lennon is ! I never knew a manlier fellow. Gad, he makes one ashamed of the sort of life one leads."

"Mr. Lennon is a very good man." And he offered me his love, thought Grace, and I rejected it ; and she felt very proud, and ashamed, and wretched.

"Yes, he's very good ; but he has sense and spirit, too, which somehow good people don't generally have. I fear our friends are not over the worst of it yet—only beginning, in fact ; for before I left Waterdale fever had broken out in good earnest. I hope our friends will escape ; but they are sure to

be, each and all, in the thick of the danger. As soon as I can contrive a pair—do you know what a ‘pair’ is, Miss Ethelstone?—I’m going down again. I’ll range myself under Lennon’s banner and try to do something; I don’t mean to keep out of the fight. So, Miss Ethelstone, if you should hear of our all being dead one of these mornings, you need not be surprised—and it’s not worth weeping for. Indeed, I am inclined to think it’s not my luck to finish-up half so creditably, and in such a cause; therefore, my display of valour and devotion is cheap. Good-bye.”

He closed the door, bowed, and the cab drove off. He had talked purposely in a rattling reckless kind of a way, in the hope of diverting Grace’s attention from her private vexations; and it must be owned that so far as Warton’s difficulties were concerned he was perfectly successful.

Think what Grace’s feelings were as she journeyed home! Need it be said that she at once pictured Ralph Lennon as the fore-doomed victim of fever? Need it be said that the mere thought utterly shattered the whole foundation on which she had rested the resolution that sent him from her? Bitterly, bitterly did she now reproach herself. Pride, vanity, mean suspicion now seemed the sole impelling motives of a conduct which once showed as if it were governed only by principle and right feeling. “I might have had the right to be near him even now,” she said to herself; and she envied above all human beings Mrs. Alwyn, who could take a share in the work and the danger. “What wonder if he should admire her, and think highly of her?” poor Grace asked of herself; “she is brave, and I know she is good and generous and devoted. She goes into danger, she lives for something,—and I stagnate here, no good for any purpose, for any human creature; and when I had a chance of winning the right to stand by his side I threw it away like a miserable, self-conceited, suspicious fool! Ah, I did not understand him—I am not worthy to understand him; and if he lives through this he will forget me, and if he dies I shall not be near; I shall hear of it days and days after, perhaps, as one who had no share in his life, no right even to be told of his death!”

For it would be superfluous to say that Grace Ethelstone now regarded the Waterdale calamities exclusively as they were likely to affect Ralph Lennon. Flood and fever were only ordained to come that they might smite him, or that, even if

they spared him, they might banish her from his memory. She was a girl full of generous and sympathetic feeling, but just then it must be owned that she thought little of any other sufferers whom the water and the pestilence threatened, but only of Ralph Lennon's danger. When she remembered Mrs. Alwyn it was with envy, and, perhaps, with some secret, far-down, smouldering sense of womanly anger and jealousy towards one who was so blessed as to share the danger that threatened him. Captain Eastham's words of praise when he spoke of Myra Alwyn came back to her memory; and she thought, "*He*, too, will praise her—has praised her—perhaps will contrast her with me, and remember that I misunderstood him, was thankless to him and deserted him; and he will despise me."

In such condition of mental torture Grace Ethelstone reached the now dismal house which she called her home. She was able to assure her aunt, on Captain Eastham's authority, that Walter Warton was quite well—only greatly occupied; and the story of the flood and fever in Cumberland served at least to distract Mabel's attention for the moment. In a day or two after came a purposely reassuring letter from Walter.

Every day now Grace took care to get a paper. Of course it told her nothing. A London daily journal concerns itself little about the calamities of a Cumberland village. She did find one day a small paragraph alluding to the floods and the subsequent outbreak of fever, but it gave no hint as to the evil results of either. Days and weeks wore on, during which her misery sometimes seemed greater than she could bear. She grew thin, pale, and even haggard. Her eyes grew brighter, her step became languid. Mabel might have been greatly alarmed by the change in the appearance of her niece, but that Walter had not yet come, and Mrs. Warton was absorbed in her own grievances and her own fears. So there was little sympathy, no companionship, between these two women; and Grace was nearly as desolate as if she lived in a howling wilderness. It is one of the peculiar trials of a woman's life that she can so seldom do anything but wait and bear. Custom, education, the rock of inexorable etiquette to which her sex—Andromeda like—is bound hand and foot, rob her troubles of even that bracing element of excitement which the difficulties he has to battle against provide for a man. The husband or brother goes out to fight, and falls, at all events, in

the heat and passion of active endeavour. The lot of the woman is to be tied to the stake, like the Scotch girl in the doubtful scrap of Covenanting history, until the rising tide comes slowly, cruelly in, and at last swallows her up.

Grace Ethelstone was a girl of spirit and energy. Mabel Warton was a feeble fond heavy creature; but in this regard they were on an equality. The one could but wait and watch and maunder and fear for her absent husband; the other could only feed her heart on terror for the fate of the lover whom in any case she seemed to have hopelessly lost.

At last, one memorable day, a light streak suddenly flashed in upon the cold and leaden sky of Grace's life. The postman brought her a letter, which she seized with eager joy, even before knowing whence it came. As we have spoken of women's special trials, let us not forget to mention one of their special advantages. They are glad to hear the postman, and they like receiving letters; whereas to a man the prospect of his letters is a bore and an infliction. The reason requires no philosophy to find out. Your wife's letters come from her friends merely, and are all pleasant gossip or interesting family news. Your friends do not write to you to gossip with you, or tell you of what is going on: people only write to you when they have business with you—as a rule only when they have claims to remind you of or favours to ask. Observe how eagerly a woman snatches at her letters—observe with what an air of doubt, satiety, discomfort her husband take up and turns over his allotment, well knowing that, be they never so many, there will be hardly one among them which anybody could find pleasure in reading.

Grace, then, took her letter eagerly. It was in a woman's handwriting, and she knew but one woman who was likely to write to her. It must be from Mrs. Alwyn, though it bore the Folkestone postmark. It was from Mrs. Alwyn, and Grace's excitement when she had turned in the first instance to the end of the letter, and read the signature, was very keen.

Many a time of late days she had thought of writing to Mrs. Alwyn. Were there no other reason to prompt her, she was absolutely in need of some one to help and guide her in her scheme of leaving England. How to set about going to Italy; how to get there; what to do when she got there—were torturing puzzles to a girl who had never in her life made a journey alone, or gone anywhere out of England. She had

had vague ideas once or twice of cutting off her hair, getting boy's clothes, and, thus relieved of the social inconveniences of womanhood, taking the first train and steamer for the Continent anywhere, and trusting to Providence for the rest. But this scheme, on calm consideration, seemed hardly satisfactory ; and she often thought of Mrs. Alwyn as the one woman she knew who could help and counsel her. For some days back she had almost forgotten all this in her anxiety about Lennon's present dangers ; and Mrs. Alwyn became in her eyes the one only woman who could tell her anything of him, and understand her feelings. Yet again and again she found that she could not bring herself to write to Myra Alwyn. No ; there had been that said of *her* which the pride and bitterness of Grace's heart declared must divide them. Grace did not believe a word that was hinted or spoken against Mrs. Alwyn ; but if, *if* Lennon admired her, and had her companionship in a time of trial, enough ! If he admired her only too much—and what was more likely ?—then with what heart could Grace bring herself to appeal to such a friendship ? No ! She actually began more than one letter to Myra Alwyn, striving to school herself into magnanimity and Christianity and what not ; and she only tore them up in anger and despair ; and at last boldly asked of herself, “ What is the use of this ? I am only a woman, with a woman's love, and spite, and jealousy. I cannot be anything else, and I will not pretend to be.”

So her heart leaped up with surprise and fear, and something like hope, when she opened the letter and saw Myra Alwyn's name.

This was what she read :

“ MY DEAR GRACE,—I have been for a long time thinking of writing to you, and I have been quite as long expecting to hear from you. Unfriendly creature, why do you not write ? Perhaps you will retort upon me ; and perhaps there would be a little, only a little, justice in the retort. But we have had a heavy time of it lately, as you must have heard, and our poor little community seemed marked out for calamity after calamity. First we had floods, and then we had fever ; and our poor people suffered cruelly from both. So many suffered, and so many perished, that I feel a sort of scruple even about expressing gratitude for our own escape, and *the escape of those we value most, and who were in most danger.* It seems something

like selfishness to rejoice that we were unharmed when so many suffered. One should thank God for it in silence ; but I tell you, because you will be glad to know.

“One of those who were in great danger was poor Mr. Berry, whom I think you know—Mr. Lennon’s *protégé*, or, as Mr. Lennon himself would say, his friend. And I am glad now to echo the words, for I have learned to understand Mr. Lennon better in every way than I did when you and I last spoke together about him. Mr. Berry was very bad, and, indeed, at one time it seemed as if he could not recover ; but Heaven spared him, and he is quite restored now. Mr. Lennon was not attacked by fever at all, although nobody could have taken less care to guard himself ; and Dr. Alwyn, too, who was in danger from morning to night, came off quite unharmed.

“But it so happened that I spent a few hours in helping to nurse poor Berry ; and they who watch over fever-patients often hear truths they did not expect, as well as wild delirious ravings. I heard from Mr. Berry’s lips, my dear Grace, something about which I want so particularly and so earnestly to speak to you. I am now staying at Folkestone for a few days, as I was ordered imperatively to take change of air. Will you come and pass a day or two with me—as many days as you can ? I am very, very lonely here ; my husband is in Scotland, and I don’t know a creature here, and I don’t want to ; but I do want you to come and pass a little of the time with me. Indeed, I am selfish in this ; but I *must* see you, dear, and there are special reasons why I want to see you soon ; therefore, I am sure you will not refuse me, but come as soon as ever you can.—Affectionately yours,

“MYRA ALWYN.”

Grace’s heart beat strangely as she read this letter, and, of course, she read it over again and again. Her first impulse, we are sorry to say, was not to go. Her spirit resented deeply the bare idea of the kind of rivalry which had been suggested to her unsuspecting heart as unconsciously existing between Myra Alwyn and herself. But a moment of reflection allowed purer and more generous feelings to arise, and she recognised in Mrs. Alwyn a true-hearted woman, with a noble nature, whom it was well to know, whose friendship it was a pride to have. And then came with these better thoughts the refreshing consoling hope that at last she had found perhaps some woman’s

heart to which she might confide the trials and disappointments and struggles of her own. At least Myra Alwyn could tell her what to do with her life, could help her wavering conscience in deciding whether she ought to leave Mabel or not, and could show her in any case how to make existence better than a vain repining, a prolonged regret. She did not think very much about that part of Myra's letter which related to the words Tom Berry had let fall in his delirious hours. She had heard many times casual and vague allusions to an early political association between Berry and Walter Warton, and she rather fancied that it was something concerning the latter she was to hear, and which, perhaps, she was to be the medium of conveying in some graduated and softened way to Warton's wife. That anything Tom Berry had said could affect her personally, it never occurred to her to suppose. But she assumed that it was somehow a duty to go and hear what Myra had to say ; and that thought alone would have decided her.

She told Mabel of the invitation ; and Mabel received the news with upturned eyes which expressed amazement and other emotions the owner of the eyes did not care to put into words. The amazement was even increased when Grace declared that she meant to go.

"I am sure, Grace, you are very good," was the sole and significant comment of her aunt—a comment which sent a flush of pain and anger across her niece's face. Marvellous and inexhaustible is the pain-giving power of the good and the dull. "Weak creatures too have stings," says Schiller's hero. Perhaps the keenest of the stings are those which are used by weak creatures who have no idea of stinging at all.

But, her comment over, Mabel was really glad that her niece should have a day or two of change and relief from the moping monotony of the life that had lately been hers. Besides, Mrs. Warton was anxious to hear all the news of what had lately passed at Waterdale, and what had happened to Ralph Lennon, and how about Tom Berry, whom she remembered well as "a devoted follower of Walter, my dear, long ago, before you were grown enough to understand politics. And, indeed, I often meant to ask Walter about him, for I heard nothing of him this long time, only I forgot it all. One has so many tiresome and vexatious things to think about, that really, Grace, I begin to be afraid sometimes that I am growing quite egotistical and selfish."

So Mabel sped the going of her niece. When Grace next day was kissing the children, and about to leave in a specially ordered "fly" for the station, Mabel threw her arms around her neck, and said :

"O, dear Gracie, how I hope something good is going to happen to you !"

Grace smiled very sadly.

"And, Gracie dear, while you are away, do think of me and pray for me—pray that I may see my dear Walter again before you return, and that he may be well, and we may meet you with some good news ; for I have had such miserable dreams lately, and I can't imagine why he stays away so long ; and I always think that he has fallen sick somewhere, or perhaps is dead." Her eyes were suffused with tears.

"Dear Mabel, I wish I had not thought of going until Walter came back. No—I'll not go. It will be time enough when he comes."

"O, no, Gracie! Don't make me think myself so foolish and selfish. No—don't say another word—good-bye, dear !—Go on !"

These last words were spoken to the driver. With an utterly unwonted effort of energy, Mabel literally dismissed her niece, and cut short all possible remonstrance.

"I think something good is going to happen to her," Mabel said to herself, as she stood upon the little grass plat and watched the departing vehicle. "I don't know why ; but I do think something good is going to happen to her ; and I wish I didn't feel so miserable about Walter."

It was evening when Grace reached Folkestone, and was welcomed by her friend. Mrs. Alwyn allowed the hours which still remained between day and darkness to pass away in conversation over all that had happened in the way of pestilence and deluge since they last met ; and only when they sat alone in the deepening twilight, and when the two women could scarcely see the hue of each other's faces, did she approach the one purpose which she had most at heart. She came to it, at last directly—not without a flush on her cheek, and something of a tremulous motion on her lips.

"Grace dear, why don't you marry Mr. Lennon? He loves you."

And then, before Grace could recover from the surprise of the sudden question, Myra told her all she had heard and

guessed, and at last discovered ; and spoke of Lennon's manliness and truth and goodness with a fervour which brought tears into her own eyes as well as into those of Grace. And all was spoken so tenderly, and with such a delicate friendliness, that Grace could not refuse her confidence if she would ; and at last—at last—Myra learned the one supreme reason which had influenced Grace in her heavy sacrifice. She learned that Lennon had been credited with love for her—for Myra Alwyn—and she learned too, piecemeal, from what lips that story had come. And without betraying excitement or anger, without breathing a word or hint of what she knew of Walter Warton, Myra calmly and firmly crushed the whole story. Perhaps there was a certain slight, almost imperceptible bitterness of expression in the tone of her voice when, dismissing that part of the subject for ever, Mrs. Alwyn said :

“My dear, Mr. Lennon never cared for me, or thought of me, any more than he did of any poor woman in the village—or of the Queen of Sheba.”

And there the conversation closed. Mrs. Alwyn never said a word about the subject next day ; and to Grace it only seemed as if she had learned, too late, that she might have been happy. What was done was done, and there was no recalling it now. She had wronged Ralph Lennon and herself ; and Mrs. Alwyn had told her that Lennon was going to leave England, and so all was over.

But that evening came Ralph Lennon, summoned by telegram, to Folkestone. And this was how it happened that, when he arrived and asked for Mrs. Alwyn, he was shown into a room where he found not Myra Alwyn, but Grace Ethelstone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FAITHFUL UNBELIEF.

DR. ALWYN had got through his business in Scotland pretty quickly, and hurried down southward to spend a few bright days with his wife on the Folkestone shore ; but he paused for a little in London. He really had a day or so to spare, and he positively would at last do something about finding

a good publisher for the long-contemplated *Flora*. After all, he began to think, it is very hard to work steadily at a book until you have arranged for its publication. Once fix a time, understand that the printer must have it precisely at the appointed day, find the proofs of the earlier chapters come pouring in upon you, and the printer sending messages for more of the MS. ; and then a man is put on his mettle, he really goes to work with a will, and he gets the thing positively done at last. Therefore Alwyn resolved that he really would not leave London until he had made positive engagements, and put himself actually into harness. He meant to indulge himself in a little luxury too ; the book should be handsomely printed, and it should be rich in illustrations, most of which were to be the work of Myra ; and one or two, of perhaps a rather more pretentious style, he had compelled Grace Ethelstone to promise that she would do. This was to be his one work ; and as he knew there was not a ghost of a chance of its paying—in fact, he made up his mind that all the copies would have to be given away—he resolved that he would treat his friends and the scientific reviewers handsomely, and give them something fair to look at, as well as, he hoped, tolerable to read. And if—well, he was not sanguine or over-expectant—but if it should after all turn out a success, and be acknowledged as such by competent critics, and received into literature, and reproduced in popular-science editions, and give to the name of Alwyn a mild scientific lustre—why that, of course, would be a splendid result, and he had not lived in vain. If not, then he had merely done his best, and failed, like better men ; and Myra and his friends would have the book to read in handsome print—and the flowers would bloom along the edges of the lake all the same.

In any case he would arrange at once for the publication of the book, and so bind himself to its prompt completion. From his hotel in Jermyn Street he despatched a telegram to his wife, to tell her of his arrival in town, but that for very, very particular reasons, of which more hereafter, he did not think he could leave London that night—perhaps not until the following evening. For he looked upon the finding of a publisher—although he was about to publish at his own risk—as a difficult, racking, and slow business ; and, indeed, was nearly as nervous about presenting himself with his order for printing, engraving,

advertising, and publishing, as a maiden from the country with her first novel.

He walked down the Haymarket and Pall-Mall to the Strand ; then he suddenly bethought him of Ralph Lennon, who he had no doubt was in town, and it seemed a happy idea to take Ralph into council, and go with him to the publisher. For Ralph knew something of science, and had, as he learned, in earlier days written for reviews and mixed with literary men—and, more than that, had once published a volume of fierce youthful poems, the general object of which was to find fault with the arrangement of Providence, and to let off the crackers of youthful scepticism in the face of Heaven. Lennon had at the time been a passionate student of “Queen Mab,” and some of his college friends assured him his verses were quite as fine as Shelley’s. But even their Promethean iconoclasm and indignation failed somehow to arouse the admiration or the pious wrath of critics ; and a little volume of Sunday school-hymns could not have received less attention at the hands of the reviewers. But the fact that Lennon had published anyhow any sort of book naturally made him an authority on publishing, and a valuable guide to one ambitious in that way ; and so Dr. Alwyn resolved to find him out, and take him into council. He knew Lennon’s hotel, and he turned in there and inquired for his friend. This was the day but one after Lennon had left town.

No ; Mr. Lennon was not there ; had not been there since the day before yesterday ; but was undoubtedly returning, for nearly all his luggage was there. A gentleman had been asking for him two or three times yesterday, and a person had just been to look for him, and left a message to say Tom Berry was in town, and would come in the evening. “O, here *is* the gentleman again, sir.”

“Not come back ?” said Walter Warton in a strident voice, and looking at nobody. He had kept calling, not that he wanted to see Ralph Lennon, but that he wanted to be sure that he was still absent, to have heavier and heavier proofs against him.

“Why, Warton, is it you ?” said Dr. Alwyn, advancing. “Glad to see you ! On the same errand as myself, looking for our long-lost friend ?”

“Dr. Alwyn ! Where have you come from ?”

“From Fife, my liege ; at least, from Scotland.”

"And when?"

"Last night, or rather this morning."

"You have not been to Folkestone?"

"No, not yet; and I fear I can't get there to-day, and I am sorry for it, because my wife will be lonely."

"A savage smile crossed Warton's livid face. They had now reached the street, and Dr. Alwyn saw with amazement how haggard and wild his companion looked. He seemed like a man who had not slept or even undressed the previous night. His eyes were bloodshot, his beard was unshaven, his hands were dirty—yes, actually dirty.

"I am glad I met you," exclaimed Warton. "I want to speak to you. I *must* speak to you. Not here: five minutes alone—anywhere—but we must be alone."

"Certainly, anywhere you like; but what is the matter with you? Are you ill, Warton, or have you any bad news to tell? Has any misfortune happened to you? Are your family all well?"

"O yes, yes; all quite well. Everybody quite well, except you, Dr. Alwyn, and me. I can't talk to you here. Will you give me five minutes' conversation or not?"

"Certainly; I have said so. But I hate mysteries and surprises, Warton; and I must know one thing at once. Have you any bad news for me? Is my wife well?"

"Well, O yes! Mrs. Alwyn is quite well. When I saw her last, only the day before yesterday, she was quite well, and happy."

"Then I have no more fears or conjectures, and I don't even ask whether what you want to say relates to yourself or to me. Where shall we go?"

"To my chambers, in the Temple?"

"My hotel is nearer—Jermyn Street."

"Then come there."

Warton hailed a hansom, and they got in and drove to the hotel. Neither spoke a word on the way. Dr. Alwyn had heard something lately of Warton's difficulties, and felt no doubt that the purpose of their mysterious conference had some reference to his companion's own affairs.

They got out, and Alwyn led the way to his small sitting-room, handed a chair to his friend, and then said cheerily, "Now then, Warton, for your portentous communication.

Business first, if it is to be business, and we can talk of other things afterwards."

Warton sat down and thrust his hands into his pockets, and stared at the carpet. Then he glanced at the table, and made a motion with one hand, as if to stretch for something which ought to be there,—he needed a little stimulant to his courage now that the time had come,—and shrugged his shoulders despondingly. At last he drew a long breath, and seemed to have screwed himself up to the task he had undertaken.

"Dr. Alwyn, I have something painful to tell you ; but you will not blame me. Perhaps at first you will not believe me. I do not ask you to hear me patiently—no man could hear very patiently what I have to say ; but I do ask you to hear me."

"Out with it, man ! The prologue is, I feel no doubt, a good deal worse than the performance. Out with it at once, Warton—don't be eloquent."

"Did you expect to find Ralph Lennon here in London ?"

"Yes ; I did. What then ? Has anything happened to him ?"

"You don't know where he is now ?"

"Surely not ; but your manner makes me anxious to know."

"You shall know. Mrs. Alwyn is in Folkestone ?"

"Yes. What of that ?"

"Is she alone ?"

"She is. What has this to do with the matter ?" Dr. Alwyn did not like this sort of cross-questioning. There was something sinister in it. His usually clear brow darkened, and his lips contracted.

"She is not alone, Alwyn ! I tell you you are deceived. Ralph Lennon is with her and has been these two days."

"It's a lie !" exclaimed Dr. Alwyn, springing fiercely up, and looking for the time once more like the Alwyn of five-and-twenty years ago who pulled stroke-oar at Oxford, and was not unskilled to stand up to the sturdy and muscular bargee. "It's a lie—a—a—downright lie !" (O, what a narrow escape that from the use of a stronger expression !) "And what do you mean—and how dare you, sir, come and make your insolent insinuations about my wife ?"

Warton had not up to this moment felt quite assured that

Dr. Alwyn—clergyman though he was—might not knock him down at the first brunt of the revelation. He had a nervous dread and horror of physical violence. Therefore he felt much relieved now that the worst danger was over. He thought he could manage the rest easily.

"I said I did not expect you to be patient. How could I? You are angry with me; but you will soon transfer your anger to its proper object. Alwyn, I use no insinuations. I tell you what I know, and no more. I tell you that your wife telegraphed to London asking Lennon to come to her. I tell you that he went to her. I tell you that he has been with her since the day before yesterday."

"I don't believe a word of it. It's all a confounded mistake of some kind, and you ought to be ashamed, Warton, to talk such detestable things of a lady—a lady the latchet of whose shoes, sir, you are not worthy to unloose. Go away, Warton, and let us not meet any more—anywhere. I tell you again, I don't believe it—not a word! Tell the liar who told you this stuff that he is a fool for his pains; and, stay, don't tell me who he is; I had much better not know."

"But I swear to you it is true! It is as true as that God is in heaven! I saw the telegram with my own eyes—I saw Lennon go into Mrs. Alwyn's lodgings—and I saw him leave her at midnight."

"*You* saw all this—*you*? How came you to see what happened at Folkestone?"

"Because I suspected Lennon—and—and I watched and followed him."

"O!" A sort of faint light seemed somehow to break upon Dr. Alwyn. "You watched and followed him! You have quarrelled with Lennon?"

"No, Dr. Alwyn," replied Warton with a bitter smile; "your conjecture is a failure, and it is not much of a compliment to me; but let that pass. I have not had one word of quarrel with Lennon. We are good friends."

"It is because of your good friendship then that you come and tell me this—this singular story! It won't do, Warton. I don't know how you have been deceived—I don't know whether you are trying to deceive: I am not sure whether you are madman or scoundrel; but this I do know, your story is not true. I don't believe it."

"This is the very blindness of incredulity. I tell you I saw

Lennon with my own eyes—I watched him—I saw him come out—I saw what I don't care to describe to you——”

“No, you had better not!”

“You are deceived; you are made a fool of. I suspected this a long time; now I know it.”

“Listen, Mr. Warton; and whatever comes of this conversation it must be the last we ever have. I cannot divine your motive; you may have a good motive, though I cannot believe any man ever yet acted as you seem to have done from a motive wholly good. But I owe it to my wife to pledge my honour even to you that, if you are speaking sincerely in this, you are utterly mistaken. I know Myra Alwyn. Even if all that you say be literally true, there is some honest and just explanation of it. That explanation I at least shall await patiently. I am sorry you came and told me of all this, because it ends our acquaintance—of necessity. I cannot continue any friendship with a man who, from whatever motive, could speak so of my wife—of my dear, dear true and pure wife. It is the first time, sir, I have ever listened to this sort of thing, and it shall be the last.”

“This passes all belief,” said Warton, springing up. “I pity you, Alwyn, for being so blind and so deceived. But you are a model husband—that is one thing certain. Go on and believe! I am sorry I told you anything, the advice is so completely thrown away. I accept your renunciation of friendship. I release you from any acquaintanceship or even recognition. I have told you of the base and wicked plot that is being played out at your expense, and your answer is insult. Believe and believe; your eyes will be opened some day.”

“Stay a moment.” Warton was about to leave the room. “You must have had some motive in this. I tell you again I don't believe in high-minded men playing the part of detectives; and I am sure there was some secret reason for your doing what you have done. You say you have long suspected this. You say you watched, and followed, and all that. Why did you suspect? Why did you watch? Why did you feel called upon to constitute yourself the critic of my wife's conduct?”

“Do you really want to know?” replied Warton, turning back with wild passion in his eyes. His reception, the utter failure of his attempt, his fury at what he thought Alwyn's wilful blindness, were driving him to despair. “Do you really

want to know? Then I'll tell you—there is nothing in it to shake *your* nerves. Because I loved your wife; and I told her so; and she flung me off and scorned me; and I knew it must be for *him*; and I watched him and her, and I found them out!”

For a moment Warton fully expected, as the light of Dr. Alwyn's clear gray eyes flashed on him, that he was about to receive a blow which would dash him to the ground; but he hardly heeded even that just now.

There was, indeed, a fierce momentary struggle in Alwyn's heart. But the habits of the clergyman prevailed, and the strong clenched right hand was dropped.

“That explains all,” he said calmly. “You can go now. No words of mine could express the contempt I feel for you. Even if I were not a clergyman, I doubt whether I should not be degraded by inflicting on you the punishment you deserve. But don't delay a moment here; I cannot long answer for my self-control.”

He pointed to the door and turned his back. When he looked round again, Warton was gone.

Then Dr. Alwyn sat in his armchair, and buried his face in his hands. Indeed, it is not unlikely that tears were for a while in his eyes. He felt that his wife, his home, their life, and their love had been degraded by the hideous dialogue he had just been forced to carry on. Never, never before did he conceive it possible that a doubt could enter any human mind of the purity of the wife whom he so loved, and of whom he was so proud. He grieved for her, felt shamed for her, that she should be thus suspected, thus calumniated, even by one who had avowed so base a motive. And he felt too a sickening distrust and disgust of the world and its ways. If it was true what that man had said—that he had dared to make love to Myra all the time that he, Myra's husband, trusted him as a friend, regarded him as a Christian and a man of honour—then what a hideous maze of deceit and wickedness had been spinning around a pure and quiet home? And Myra?—did she know it—had she kept it secret, from whatever motive, from him? Was not that wrong to do? Is there anything whatever which a true wife may lawfully keep as a secret from her true husband? Ah, no! he sadly thought, there is no such thing. Such concealment is all wrong. And did Myra conceal?

Whatever might be the truth which he had yet to learn, he could believe nothing bad of her. If she had concealed anything from fear or prudence or delicacy, or whatever other motive, it was unwise, it was a mistake, it was a fault. But he could as soon doubt of the truth of the Gospel he daily taught and read, as of the purity and goodness of his wife.

He had with him a book which was far more dear to him than even the cherished Flora ; in which he found higher thoughts than in his Shakespeare and Chaucer, and a more consoling influence than the serene stars of midnight diffused. And he opened it to calm his agitated mind ; and on the first page whereon his eyes lighted he read some words that seemed as if they spoke to him for his absent wife, and ordered him to have no doubt of her truth and faith :

“For false witnesses are risen up against me ; and such as breathe out cruelty.”

“Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.”

“My lovers and my friends stand aloof from me, and my kinsmen stand afar off.”

“They also that seek for my life, lay snares for me ; and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long.”

It seemed to him almost as if he heard the voice of his wife, sweet, clear, and tender, read out these words to him in answer to any secret half-formed doubt that might have crept into his startled soul. And he felt rebuked, ashamed that even for half a moment the mere breath of such a doubt could have passed over him. He felt no doubt any more. He was satisfied of the truth and faith of the woman he had married, who was not, indeed, he sadly acknowledged, the wife of his youth, as is the Scriptural phrase, but who had, of her own free choice, given her youth to him ; and to whose love he at least brought the love of a heart that was always young in its feelings. No, he thought with pride, the man did not live whose word could be evidence against her purity and honour to raise a doubt in the heart of her husband.

He kept the volume open before him, and his eyes and his thoughts rested on its consoling, strengthening passages. So much did it help to calm his mind, that he began to think of Walter Warton as one afflicted by some strange mental delusion, which indeed his disordered wild appearance seemed of itself

to indicate ; and Alwyn pitied him, and reproached himself as having erred in driving away as a slanderer and a culprit one who needed care and watchfulness as the victim of a shaken reason.

He must have remained some time, perhaps an hour, thus silent and thoughtful, sad, indeed, and shaken in nerves, yet secure and serene of soul, when he was disturbed by a knock at the door. He glanced quickly round the room to see that all was orderly—he had a steady-going middle-aged English gentleman's veneration for order under whatever circumstances—and then he called out to the disturber to come in.

The door opened, and Ralph Lennon entered the room, looking unusually bright and vivacious, and holding out his hand.

"I hardly expected to find you in town so soon," said Ralph ; "but I came on chance, and I was so glad to hear that I had made a lucky venture. I would not wait to send up my card, but insisted on coming straight up. I have something good to tell you—congratulate me beforehand. But what is the matter ?—have you been ill ?"

He came to a sudden pause, and looked anxiously at Alwyn's pale face and disturbed expression.

Alwyn had for his part scanned his friend's face a moment with penetrating gaze. He read nothing there but frankness and honesty.

"No, Lennon, not in the least ill ; I am glad to see you. Tell me your good news ; but first give me your hand."

Lennon thought his friend must have known the good news already, for the warm pressure which his hand received seemed as if it spoke a silent fervent congratulation.

CHAPTER XXX.

"O, THAT'S SUDDEN !"

WALTER WARTON rushed into the street after his abortive interview with Dr. Alwyn. He had, however, to stop for a few moments, and then to walk very slowly, for the palpitation of his heart came on so fiercely, and came, too, accompanied with such a difficulty of breathing, that he could

hardly move. He had some vague idea of going to his chambers, and lying down there upon a sofa, and getting some brandy—and then thinking out the situation calmly, if he could. As yet he was too fierce and bitter against all the world to feel how deeply and how uselessly he had degraded himself. But he had a dim sense of ruin hanging over him; of shame and hatred following him; of friends turned into enemies; of the whole circle of society in a conspiracy to tempt him and deceive him, cause him to betray himself and then cast him off. At the present moment he hated Alwyn perhaps most of all; for he had expected to see Alwyn flung like himself into a passion of wrath and despair, and, lo! Alwyn had looked calmly and trustingly to the image of his absent wife, and refused to believe himself wronged. Perhaps Warton's only clear thought at present was a resolve to go to work again to find proofs irrefragable, to force Alwyn's eyes open, thrust the truth down his throat, confound all his enemies together, and then—let what would come.

He was just about to hail a passing hansom when some one caught him by the arm. Turning impatiently, almost savagely round, he saw the handsome genial face of Captain Eastham.

"Why, Warton, I have been looking for you in no end of places! Glad to find you at last. But what's the matter, old fellow? You look dreadfully cut up."

"Nothing, nothing at all, except a headache, or something of that kind. I am glad to see you, Eastham. Which way are you going? I was just about to drive to the Temple."

He earnestly hoped his friend was going some other way.

"I'm going westward. But don't be in a hurry. I suppose I may now openly congratulate you, may I not?"

"Congratulate *me*? What do you mean, Eastham?"

"Don't look so angry. I didn't suppose it was such a profound secret. The fact is, Warton, I've just come from Folkestone—on my way from Paris—a flying visit there of a day; and I've heard the whole thing, and seen the parties to the conspiracy too—and, by Jove, I envy one of them. So I know it all, and you needn't make any more mystery about it."

"Eastham, I don't know what the devil you are talking about. If there is anything very funny in all this, I tell you candidly I'm not in a condition to understand humour just now. Pray spare me."

"How serious and wretched you look! I fear, Warton,

something is really wrong with you. And you positively tell me you know nothing of all this ? ”

“ All what ? ”

“ About your niece and Lennon—that they are to be married——”

“ Lennon and Grace to be married ! My God ! Eastham, you are mistaken—you are talking nonsense ! If you only knew—and, by Heaven, you shall know ! Lennon and Grace ! No, it can’t be ; and it shan’t be ! ”

“ Why not ? I always thought Lennon and you were the warmest friends. This I do know, Warton, whatever may have happened since, that Lennon has behaved like a true friend to you. And as for this business of the marriage, I can tell you—and I don’t know why you are ignorant of it—that it is as certain as that you and I are talking here. Lennon himself told me ; and so did Mrs. Alwyn ; and—why, confound it, man, I’ve seen the bride-elect, and congratulated her ; and a charming girl she is ! What a sly fellow Lennon is ! I never suspected anything of the kind, or—who knows ?—there might have been a rivalry and a duel.”

“ I beg of you, Eastham, to tell me coolly one thing, for my mind is all distracted. Where did you see Grace Ethelstone ? ”

“ At Folkestone, of course—with Mrs. Alwyn. The fact is, it seems, there had been some misunderstanding, or lovers’ quarrel, or something of the kind, and Mrs. Alwyn—who, between ourselves, is a regular trump and a delightful little woman—she set to work to make it all up, and of course she succeeded. Miss Ethelstone had been staying with her for some days, and she got Lennon down there too ; and you know the rest ; and you see before you, Warton, a blighted being.”

“ You are sure of all this, Eastham—sure beyond all doubt ? ”

“ Sure beyond the remotest possibility of doubt—unless Mrs. Alwyn and your niece and Lennon and I are all lunatics together. I was longing to see you to congratulate you. For, let me tell you, Warton, you are more indebted to Lennon than you think. I feel bound to tell you this now because of the way you have spoken, which I don’t understand, and was very sorry to hear. The other day when you were in a fix down yonder, it was Lennon came to the rescue, and did it unasked, and in the most delicate and handsome way.”

“ Lennon came to the rescue ! Lennon gave the money ! ”

“ Lennon, and no one else. He asked me not to tell ; and I

didn't ever since, and would not now but that your words and manner show me you are under some delusion or other about him which ought not to exist."

"You are certain of this too—quite certain?"

"The whole thing was done ~~through~~ through me."

"Then, Eastham, I am the most unfortunate wretch and the basest devil that ever lived on the earth!"

"What do you mean? What have you done?"

"Eastham, I have been mad—mad! I made a fool of myself about Mrs. Alwyn. Yes, I did; and I exposed my folly to her; and she snubbed me and scorned me; and I lost my reason. I thought I found out that Lennon and she were secretly meeting; and I followed him to Folkestone; and I never knew Grace Ethelstone was there. O, Heaven! why did they deceive me?—why did they make a secret of it, and destroy me? I thought Lennon went there for her—for Myra Alwyn—and I became insane with passion; and this very day I told her husband what I thought I had discovered!"

"Told Dr. Alwyn this horrid story?"

"Yes, I did. I told him I had found out that Ralph Lennon was at Folkestone with his wife."

"Then upon my soul, Warton, you are the greatest scoundrel and the most unfortunate wretch I ever knew. I hardly know whether most to pity you or despise you. I *was* your friend; but you cannot expect that I or any gentleman could call you a friend ever again. You should never again presume to come into the society of men of honour or modest women. My last and earnest advice to you is to go and drown yourself or blow your brains out!"

Eastham literally flung him away; for Warton had grasped him by the arm, and seemed about to essay some pitiful plea or justification of himself. Warton stood for a moment and looked after his former friend, as the latter hurried indignantly westward; then Warton shrugged his shoulders. "He is a good fellow, Eastham," he murmured feebly to himself; "and he once liked me well. Now I have lost him, as I have lost everyone. Everyone! Nobody will ever look at me again! It is all over! All over with Walter Raleigh Warton!" And as he walked slowly down the street he kept murmuring over and over again the name "Walter Raleigh Warton," "Walter Raleigh Warton," as a man might keep whispering to himself the name of some lost love. Indeed that name did represent

poor Warton's one only true love—one only abiding and earnest hope. His love had been not so much himself as the Eidolon he had raised of himself, and which, poor wretch, he symbolised in the name of Walter Raleigh Warton ; his hope had been to make that name a sound of influence, a signal of applause.

It was at the Pall-Mall end of the Haymarket that he met Eastham. He crossed the street and walked slowly along by the National Gallery and down Trafalgar Square. He stopped a moment at Morley's Hotel, and looked into the hall, and remembered one time—ever so many years ago—when Ralph Lennon and he dined together there joyously in their college days ; and he remembered the look of the hall then, and some old figures which used to be there, and were gone now ; although he had been there scores of times since, and never noticed any change. He found himself looking vacuously into shop-windows, and then wondering what he was looking at. He glanced at the Eleanor's Cross Hotel in the Strand, and tried to hurry past it ; but he could not walk quickly. His heart beat so fiercely that he thought the people who passed him in the street must hear it, and he could hardly breathe, and he had a horrible headache ; he must get home to the Temple. He might have called a cab ; but he seemed now to have an instinctive dread of its rattling motion. No, he would walk slowly, until he got a little better. He feebly thought he should like to be at home—really at home—lying in bed, and with Mabel to nurse him ; and he should like to hear the children talk round his bedside until he dropped off to sleep. He did not think much now about his position, or his prospects, or the shame into which he had plunged himself. No, he was conscious of nothing more than that he felt weak and queer and giddy, and wanted so much to lie down somewhere. Still creeping on, he suddenly began to fear he was about to be sick, or to faint, and he had a vague consciousness of turning down the first quiet street he found—one of those leading to the river—to get out of the crowd and noise and observation of the Strand. He walked a few paces down the street, and looked feebly about for some railings to hold ; for his eyes began to swim, and he saw the white clouds dancing about in the blue sky, and the pavement seemed to heave up and down, and the houses to go round, and there was a singing, hissing sound bursting through his ears. He murmured "Water—

give some water!” as if anybody could have heard him, or would have heeded; and then he saw some people coming up the street, and he made an effort to steady himself and move on. All this occupied hardly a second; yet it seemed to him a long, queer, dreamlike struggle. He stepped forward a pace or two, but became more unsteady; his head throbbed fiercely; he could see nothing but flickering motion all around him; the singing in his ears grew louder and louder; then a keen, strange, electrical pang shot through his heart, and he staggered about for an instant and fell on the pavement.

“Hillo, Bill,” shrieked a ragged street-urchin, “here’s a lark! Here’s a swell all mops and brooms!”

“O, my eye!” exclaimed Bill, rallying to the cry; “run for Bobby and a stretcher!”

“Dear, dear, what a sight!” said a decent, pallid, poor woman, who came out of one of the houses bearing a bundle of washing. “A gentleman, too! Don’t, boys; perhaps he is sick—perhaps he is in a fit.”

“O, such a fit!” exclaimed one, capering wildly about the prostrate man.

“No, missis, he’s drunk,” said the other. “I follered him, an’ I seed him staggering along.”

“I wish there was a policeman near,” said the woman, looking up and down the street in vain.

A respectably-dressed man who was just passing the Strand end of the street looked down, and seeing that something was “up,” came towards the little group. He was a dark-complexioned man with short lank hair; and he was rather too well-dressed not to make it apparent that he was of the artisan class, unused to the constant wear of broadcloth.

As he came on, he saw that a person in the attire of a gentleman was lying on the pavement.

“Is he drunk?” the new-comer asked, with scorn in his voice.

But before anyone could answer, he had seen the face.

“Why, my Heavens!” said Tom Perry, “it’s Wat Warton!” He stooped down, raised the fallen head upon his knees, and then cried out:

“My God A’mighty, he’s dead!”

* * * * *

Just at that moment on the outskirts of a little town south

of London two children were playing on the grass in front of a house we know. Their mother had been watching them for some time ; but the postman had brought a large business-like letter addressed to her—to her specially—and she had gone into the house to read it. *Presently she came rustling out, all flushed with excitement and joy :

“ Children, children, such good news as I have ! O, how I wish Grace were here to listen ! But you both must hear it. Listen, Maby ; listen, Watty ; and put away your horse for a moment. Your old grandaunt, my aunt Jane Ethelstone, is dead, and here’s a letter to say she has left us ten thousand pounds ! Ten thousand pounds ! So we shall have money enough ; and your poor papa will never have to go away from us any more. My dear, dear Walter will be out of all his difficulties now, and he will stay with us always, always ! O, how good Heaven is, and how happy we shall all be when papa is always with us ! ”

CHAPTER XXXI.

DEGENERATION OF THE HEART.

MYRA ALWYN was happy. Perhaps the most fortunate of our people in this book could not have been more happy. For she believed that she had been (under Providence, she took pious care to say) the instrument by which Ralph Lennon and Grace Ethelstone had been brought together ; and she regarded herself as by that much of good cleared of the secret sinfulness whereof she was conscious. Poor woman, her sinfulness surely was very slight. Was it sin at all to have felt for a few short moments or months the pang of an irregular affection, and to have utterly conquered it and crushed it, and out of its trampled leaves extracted gracious perfume and goodness ? Yet she felt that she had been guilty of some wrong ; and if only the heart knows its own bitterness, the heart may be presumed too to know its own evil. Perhaps the chief source of her compunction lay in the fact that she had doubly, although very harmlessly, deceived her husband—once positively when she gave out that her doubts of Lennon’s orthodoxy were her sole reason for avoiding his company ; once

negatively when she suppressed the story of Warton's ill-omened attentions. But she had sense and womanly shrewdness enough to know that one of these secrets at least she must keep in her own breast, and that the utmost relief she could find must be in appeasing her own conscience. So the moment she discovered that Lennon and Grace loved each other, and were likely, for some strange cause or other, to be separated, she resolved to devote herself to heal that breach, and bring that pair together. That would be her most appropriate penance, her most fruitful expiation. And she accomplished the task, and was happy.

We do not say that her happiness was unmixed with sadness ; no happiness men and women know ever is, even for a moment. It may be that as she looked at Grace Ethelstone, and saw her given up wholly in heart and hope to a passionate and romantic love about to be made perfect in union, she did sometimes stifle a sigh, and did perhaps think her own calm married life just a little prosaic and colourless. But she was no heroine of French romance, and indeed no sentimentalist at all ; but an energetic young Englishwoman, busy in her life, and who, if she sometimes involuntarily suspected that she had missed the crowning grace of existence—that perfect love of mutual passion which literally blends two natures and two destinies into an insoluble one—only made up her mind the more firmly to turn to account such blessings as she had, and at least cause useful household plants to grow where the passion-flowers might not bloom.

When Dr. Alwyn arrived at Folkestone his wife kissed him more tenderly and warmly perhaps than she had ever done before. Nor was that the only embrace he received ; for Myra insisted that Grace Ethelstone should kiss him too, which that obedient young woman did with apparent good-will. And Dr. Alwyn wondered within himself whether he should ever have a daughter of that age, and like her. Of which good fortune—to anticipate events a little, and dispose beforehand of our coming happiness—we are glad to believe there is now reasonable chance. The quiver is not, after all, to be empty for ever.

But this night that we speak of, this event was not yet shadowed forth. Ralph Lennon and Dr. Alwyn had dined in town, having first consulted a publisher about the *Flora*, and then came to Folkestone together. The whole group sat in a room with a great bay window overlooking the sea, and talked

calmly—as English people will do under such circumstances—of things far away from the hearts of all. There was still a shadow on Dr. Alwyn's soul from which he could not wholly emerge, and his wife's eyes often sought his face anxiously, and seemed to find something discouraging there. Yet he did his very best to be in good spirits; and if his wife observed any gloom or anxiety in him, neither Ralph nor Grace did. It is likely, indeed, that these two were not continuously occupied in watching the expression of Dr. Alwyn's countenance.

One of the ladies sang, the other played an accompaniment. Dr. Alwyn watched them with a curious, inquiring, thoughtful expression. They were both very young—his wife certainly the elder by some years, but looking now just an equal and companion of her friend. Both were handsome women. His wife was smaller, more petite of figure, with whiter face and forehead, with thick clustering dark hair massed about her head and neck. Grace was tall, fair, of full figure, and stately, with short brown hair that must be allowed to curl as it would, and could not be massed or mastered in any way; and lucid steady eyes of deep brown. Certainly, as the two women stood or sat together, she did not look the younger of the two. And one was the girl he had just then wished to have for a daughter—and the other was his wife! Raising his eyes to a mirror, he caught a glimpse of a large worn face, with bare forehead and thick gray hair—gray in its best places, and snow-white in others—and melancholy, unlovely eyes looking sadly into his—and, O, this was his own face, and he was the gray old husband of the dark-haired, pretty young creature who sat there in front of him! And he had heard to-day, for the first time, that men made love to her—that they suspected others of making love to her; and he learned that the thing, however sinful and criminal, was not wonderful, or contrary to the laws of animal nature; and he began to open his eyes to the sad ludicrous truth that he was a heavy old clergyman married to a pretty, fascinating young wife. He was sorry when the singing was over, and there was a chance that the thoughts which were at his heart might betray themselves in his face.

His reflections were destined to be suddenly disturbed. A knock was heard at the door, and a servant presently came in to say that a person was there who had come from London, and wanted to speak to Mr. Lennon particularly.

“It must be Tom Berry,” said Lennon. “I telegraphed for

him to come to town ; but really, poor fellow, I quite forgot him."

"Mr. Berry,—my patient!" exclaimed Myra. "Bring him in, by all means. I am delighted to see him."

So she waved Lennon back, and went promptly out herself, and returned leading in our old friend Tom Berry. Tom was quite too firm in his faith about nature's equality and the inborn dignity of man to feel much discomposed, under ordinary circumstances, at any introduction to society ; but this time he did look confused and even excited.

"Beg pardon of the company, I'm sure," he said, "and sorry to disturb ; but I have some very bad and strange news, and I thought I had best——"

Here his eye fell upon Grace Ethelstone, and he stopped in sudden surprise, and endeavoured to make telegraphic signs of comprehensive import to Ralph.

It was too late. Grace had seen the expression, and noted the sudden pause. She turned pale and trembled.

"It is something that relates to me," she said. "Something dreadful has happened. O, tell me at once ! Don't, pray, keep me in suspense.—O, Ralph, make him tell me the worst at once !"

"Speak out, Tom," said Ralph, calmly. "Let us know all. Miss Ethelstone had better hear it now, whatever it may be."

"Well, miss,—I'm sure I wish I hadn't had to tell it ; but Mr. Warton has been taken very bad—and—and——"

"And he's dead !" said Grace.

"God's truth, miss, he's dead !"

"O, poor Mabel ! O, the poor little children !"

Lennon caught her in his arms. Shaken and startled as he was, Lennon was the one whom the news least horrified. What thoughts went through the breast of Myra and her husband neither might speak even to the other.

Dr. Alwyn first spoke.

"Are you sure of this, Mr. Berry ? I saw Mr. Warton to-day, and was speaking to him."

Grace sprang up eagerly and looked from one to the other.

Tom Berry soon put aside all hope. "I found him," he said, "lying in a street off the Strand, dead. He had only just fallen. The doctors say he had a fit of some kind. I helped to carry him to the hospital, and I identified him ; and I

saw the papers and letters that were on him. God help us all ! it was an awful thing."

"God help us all, indeed !" echoed Alwyn. "I saw the man alive, and spoke with him this morning ; and now it is hardly nightfall, and he lies dead."

Myra, looking in her husband's eyes, now fixed on her, read that he knew something he did not speak of. She went round rather timidly, and laid her hand appealingly on his. He pressed her trembling fingers affectionately ; absolvingly, she thought ; and unseen she raised his hand to her lips and kissed it.

"I must go to poor Mabel !" said Grace, looking up to Lennon with tearful eyes.

"You must indeed, dearest, but not to-night. Somebody must first tell her what has happened. Nothing has been told her yet ?" he said, looking inquiringly at Berry.

"No, Mr. Lennon ; I took care of that. I thought you would be the best person perhaps—or Dr. Alwyn maybe."

"O no," interposed Grace. "Please let me go at once, Ralph, and tell her. It is dreadful to do ; but I think I had better tell her. I understand her best, and I can try to comfort her."

"Yes, Grace is right," said Myra. "She shall go, but not to-night. Give the poor lady, poor Mrs. Warton, this one night's rest in ignorance of her affliction ; to-morrow morning Grace shall go."

It was settled thus. Lennon and Tom Berry returned to town that night.

"They say it must have been disease of the heart," said Tom Berry, as they walked together to the railway station. "Fatty degeneration of the heart the doctor says it's likely to come out. I don't believe a word of it, Mr. Lennon ! Poor Wat Warton was ruined from beginning to end, and killed at last, I think, for the want of a heart. If he'd had any sort of heart, sir, he'd ha' been alive and well, and maybe rich and happy to-day."

Tom was not talking satirically or scornfully, or even metaphorically, but in sober earnest, and as one who confidently pronounces his serious judgment on a difficult case.

"He couldn't help it, poor fellow," he went on moralising. "He had nothing very bad in him, only he just had no heart—that was all."

Lennon only shook his head, and said nothing. He preferred not to hear of Warton's faults and wants just now. He remembered when he and the dead man were friends, and then friendly rivals, and then rivals friendly no more ; and he could not think without deep emotion over the strangeness of the fate which had brought them together in close relationship once again, only that he might be present at the last scene of his old companion's life-tragedy.

Meanwhile Walter Warton lay at the Charing Cross Hospital, a livid fearful spectacle ; all his ambition, and egotism, and passion, and hope having gone out in ignoble death. The story of his fate had already found its way about the clubs, although it did not get into any of the evening papers. Men told each other of it in smoking-rooms and libraries, and over late dinner-tables. It made its way too into the lobby of the House of Commons ; and Shavers, M.P., asked Wynter, M.P., about it.

"I say, Wynter, you knew Warton, didn't you?"

"Warton? What Warton? Warton of the Legation at Florence?"

"No, no ; Warton, the Democrat. He who stood for Northinglen the other day."

"O, *that* Warton ! Warton the Tory, you mean. Fellow who used to spout at the working men's meetings, and then turned Tory, and was taken up by the Carlton people. Yes, I knew him ; what about him !"

"Only that he's dead, that's all."

"Dead ? When ?"

"To-day, I hear."

"What did he die of?—Toryism on the brain?"

"Poisoned himself, I am told. He was found dead somewhere, Millingbury says, with a bottle in his hand containing essence of something or other. They say he was dreadfully dipped in railway affairs."

"Not a bit of it. Pursued by remorse I should rather say."

"Another John Sadleir business, Millingbury says."

"Here's Eastham—it concerns him and his friends—and he ought to know."

Captain Eastham was hurrying across the lobby to get an orange, which he meant to quarter in order that it might refresh the lips of his chief, who was taking a rhetorical survey

of the home and foreign business of the past six months, previous to the close of a long and weary session.

"I say, Eastham, you knew Warton, who came out under the wing of your people for Northinglen?"

"Yes; what of him?"

"He's dead."

"Dead! Impossible! Who says so?"

"Shavers says so."

"Millingbury told me."

"It can't be. It must be some mistake. I don't believe it."

"Eastham thinks a man becomes immortal when he turns Tory," said Wynter. "Settle it among yourselves. If the man is dead, I'm sorry as far as that goes; but he is no loss to us, and, personally, I always thought him a spouting humbug."

And this was Walter Warton's epitaph, pronounced just outside those doors to pass between which he would at one time have willingly staked his chance of ever entering the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Eastham traced the story to its source, and found out its reality. He jumped into a cab and hurried to Charing Cross Hospital. As he was entering, he rushed against Lennon, who, followed by Tom Berry, was just coming out.

"Is it true—have you seen him, Lennon?" Eastham asked feverishly.

"It is true; and I have seen him."

"He is dead?"

"Dead. He fell in the street this afternoon; some heart-disease it seems. Poor fellow! You remember his fainting that night on the platform at Northinglen?"

"To be sure—I remember it now—I had forgotten all about it. I won't go to look at him now—I know enough. It would make me sick to see him. Do you know, Lennon, when I heard this I felt exactly as if I had received a gunshot wound? I felt as if I had killed him—unfortunate fellow!"

"I don't understand. What had you to do with it?"

"I met him to-day in the street—in the Haymarket—and we quarrelled. It was not my fault; but I did tell him my mind very sharply; and I left him in a passion; and it could not have been long before this terrible thing happened."

But Lennon never knew the cause of the quarrel and his own innocent share in it ; that secret Eastham faithfully kept.

So did Dr. Alwyn keep the secret of what had been told to him by the man now dead. That night, when Mrs. Alwyn and her husband were left alone there was a sad uneasy silence for a moment ; then he looked to her and began in a low serious tone—

“ Myra ! ”

“ Yes, Alwyn,” his wife replied very meekly and deprecatingly.

“ You did wrong, dear, in not having told me at once what you knew about this most unfortunate man. Stay, let me speak. I don’t blame you—I know it was a delicate and painful subject, such as a woman shrinks from speaking of. But you ought to have told me ; there ought to be no secret between us. One evil thing it has done—a small thing, perhaps, in itself, but to be regretted—is that from it other secrecies have grown. I have heard something which I should rather not speak of, even to you, for the present ; some time you shall hear it too, but not now.”

Poor Myra was all crimsoning and palpitating, and had no Fatima desire whatever to explore the secrets of that one sealed closet.

“ This I hope and believe will be our last time for having secrets from each other. I will not ask you to promise——”

“ No, indeed—indeed you need not. I will never again have any secret from you, my dear, kind, noble husband. I did it for the best, dearest—indeed I did ; but it shall never be again. O, forgive me ! ”

She threw herself into her husband’s arms.

“ You have confidence in me, Myra ! You don’t look on me as a dreadful old fellow—too old for sympathy—and—and—love ? ”

“ For shame, to ask me such a question, or to have such a doubt ! O, Alwyn, I love you better than all the world ! ”

And it was true ; and she was absolved ; and the volume of the past was clasped, not ever to be reopened.

They talked awhile, more calmly, of unfortunate Warton and his sudden fate, and the position of his wife and orphans.

“ They will have a stanch friend in Lennon,” said Dr. Alwyn.

“ And in Grace,” added his wife. “ Except in a worldly

point of view, *he* is not much of a loss even to them. He was an unprincipled and wicked man."

"My dear," replied her husband quietly, "if he was wild, let us remember, as Dr. Johnson said of another poor creature, that he is so no more."

CHAPTER XXXII.

LENNON'S FIRST AND LAST UNTRUTH.

"**D**EAR GRACE, how glad I am you have come! I was dying to see you. I have *such* good news for you!"

These were the words with which Mabel Warton, all flushed and glowing—and, it must be owned, puffing too—with happiness and eagerness, greeted her niece the morning after the night of the last chapter. Then she saw Grace's pale face, and eyes purple-fringed from tears and sleeplessness, and she saw that a tragedy of some sort was written there; and she suddenly stopped in her speech, affrighted and aghast.

Grace put her arm round Mabel's neck and brought her into a quiet room; and the whole was soon told. Grace had the spirit and sense to spare the unfortunate woman the racking, sickening prelude of torture which sagacious people think it right to inflict by way of preparing the mind of the sufferer for the blow that is to come. The whole news came upon Mabel with a merciful swiftness and calmness. Let us say no more on that subject. Does a man still suffer torture after his neck has been severed by the axe? I don't know. Did Charlotte Corday really feel shame and agony when the executioner smote the cheek of her guillotined head? I don't know. I could not describe the sensations if I did know. I cannot now describe the sensations of a poor, weak, loving, widowed woman, who had only one idol in life, and learned now all in a moment that she had lost it for ever.

One good thing was, that the death of her husband did not mean starvation or the workhouse for her children. This she came to be thankful for after a time, but just now she thought nothing of it. Indeed, in a worldly point of view, she was far better off now than ever she had been. She had money enough to live on, and to bring her children up well; and strong kindly hearts and brains cared for her interests and theirs. The boy

will be a railway engineer yet, and perhaps will make a name ; the girl will never go to a boarding-school, but will be all the better taught at home, and will very often go on long visits to her cousin Grace in England and abroad. For it is not probable that cousin Grace and her husband will spend much of their time in England, for a few years at least. They are to live for a while in Rome, and Grace is to study art there, and become a famous sculptor. So she intends. But the sculpture never comes to anything. Antigone never grows to completeness. While the artist was at work over the marble form there appeared the first of a succession of little living forms, and the chisel, alas, was flung away for the pap-spoon ! To be resumed, of course, some other time. To be resumed when Ralph gets leisure to begin another volume of poems, or to become the exponent of new theories for the regeneration of the human race. To be resumed when Tom Berry, now the active manager of the Waterdale cottage property, sees the dream of his youth, the glorious Charter of the People, become a reality—the starting-point of a new agitation for the attainment of the equality of man. To be resumed when Myra Alwyn has completed her exquisite painting, never yet begun, of the Broken Hero by the lone Swiss lake.

All this, of course, is anticipating. But it is only anticipating what every rational reader must expect ; and when things have come to that pass that no rapidity of condensation on the author's part can possibly finish the story as fast as the reader can finish it for himself, it matters little how, or how soon, we come to an end. Ralph Lennon, of course, married his second love—indeed, in the true sense, his only love. They went abroad for a while, and after travelling from country to country, took a long rest at Rome. But Lennon was not a man who could lead an idle life, nor was his wife a woman who could encourage even love-in-idleness. He will return to settle in England, probably ; will engage himself in politics, and even in money-making of some kind ; and very likely will ultimately represent the borough of Northingen in the House of Commons. But it is not probable he will make any great success there as a debater. His life was one which had few successes, except the one worth all others earth could give him—the winning of a heart that could unite with his and be true to him ; and even this success came not soon, but somewhat late to him. The best of his life was its Indian summer.

Ralph Lennon was a truthful man ; but it is only just to record here that he once spoke a false word. It was thus. When Grace and he, after their marriage (which was delayed some months by Warton's death, and the necessity of caring for his widow), were taking leave of Mabel, Mrs. Warton of course wept and prayed for their happiness.

"But you will be happy, Grace, my dear," she said ; "for you are marrying the best of men, except my own dear Walter. Ah, Ralph, you will not forget him—your old friend ? You knew him since he was a boy. Did you ever know so good and pure a man ?"

Ralph was staggered by this sad home-thrust, and he would have evaded reply if he could. But Mabel looked wonderingly and almost impatiently at him, and pressed her question :

"Did you, Ralph, ever know any one—any man, I mean—so good and pure as my poor Walter ?"

Ralph stooped down, kissed her, and said in a low tone,

"Never, Mabel ; never !"

This was the first, and let us hope the last, falsehood ever told by Ralph Lennon. Under the circumstances, perhaps he may be forgiven.

THE END.

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